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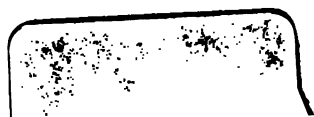
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HALF-REPENTANCE.

A SERMON,

PREACHED IN

THE CHURCH OF ST. MARY-THE-VIRGIN,
OXFORD,

ON

ASH-WEDNESDAY, 1857.

BY

SAMUEL, LORD BISHOP OF OXFORD,

CHANCELLOR OF THE MOST NOBLE ORDER OF THE GARTER, AND LORD
HIGH ALMONER TO THE QUEEN.



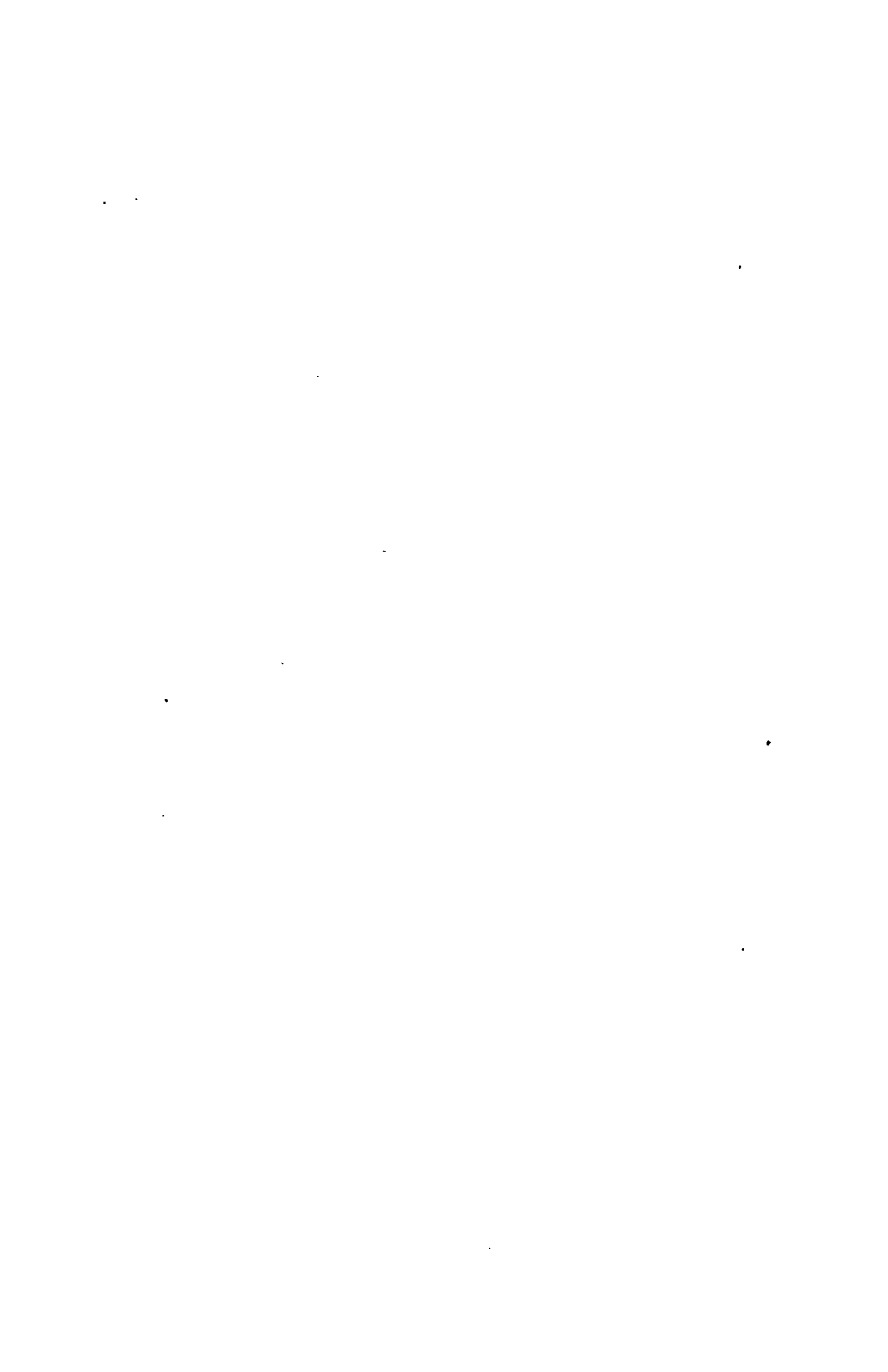
OXFORD,

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JOHN HENRY AND JAMES PARKER.

M DCCCLVII.

100. x. 127.



A SERMON,

&c.

2 COR. vii. 10.

“For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.”

IN opening this series of special services, I will say first a few words as to its cause and object.

And first for its cause.

We believe then, brethren, that there is amongst us, at this time, a great deal of deadness of heart as to serving God; that there is too much coldness of affection to the gracious Lord who died for us; that there is much to grieve and dishonour the blessed Spirit, our Sanctifier; and that self-deception abounds amongst us,—and that all these evils are daily destroying souls for which Christ died. When, indeed, is this not the too true picture of Christ’s visible Church? Therefore is it that these forty days of Lent are set apart, year by year, as a time for special acts of self-denial, self-searching, and prayer. And it is to aid you in so using them that this course of sermons is to be here preached. This is our object:—To lead, if God of His mercy so permits, some of you to a deeper penitence and

a more earnest piety. To lead you to seek from Christ the Lord the power to cast away some old habits of sin and spiritual weakness, and to run more truly the race set before you : to awaken some who sleep, to convert some from sin to God. Therefore will you, God willing, be addressed here throughout this season by different voices, all urging on you the same great truths ; all alike trusting to the aid of God the Holy Ghost to bring home to your hearts the great subjects of sin and of salvation with the power of the Lord.

That this may be the fruit of our assembling here together, let me intreat you from the heart to ask now, with me, of the God of all grace, of the Lord and lover of our souls,—

“ O Lord, raise up (we pray Thee) Thy power, and come among us, and with great might succour us ; that whereas, through our sins and wickedness, we are sore let and hindered in running the race that is set before us, Thy bountiful grace and mercy may speedily help and deliver us ; through the satisfaction of Thy Son our Lord, to whom with Thee and the Holy Ghost be honour and glory, world without end. Amen.”

The subject on which I have undertaken, brethren, to address you, may well stand at the threshold of our whole series. For there is no more fatal, and perhaps no more common, hindrance to a real turning of the soul to God, than a *half-repentance* ; which, therefore, is most truly that

“sorrow of the world which worketh death;” and if this hindrance could be swept away from amongst us, many are the souls which might indeed be brought to Christ and to salvation.

Now, in entering on the subject, I need not, I think, occupy your time in proving to you that there is, indeed, such a thing as half-repentance. The cases of Saul and Ahab in the Old Testament, of Herod and of Felix in the New, the sight of the evil in the Church around us, its existence in some measure, alas! in too many of ourselves, may suffice without further labour to prove thus much. Rather would I endeavour to trace out, with you, with such accuracy as I can, wherein the evil consists, for this may shew us its deadly quality, and suggest to us its cure.

Now to see the special nature of this evil, we must understand clearly what is the eventual character of that true repentance of which this is the counterpart.

The essence, then, of true repentance is summed up in that brief description which St. Paul gives of his own preaching: “Repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ*.” It is the turning of a living soul, conscious of its own sin, from that sin to the God against whom its sin has been committed, for deliverance from that sin. And in us Christians it is such a turning to God, through the blood of Jesus Christ our Lord, the one Atone-

* Acts xx. 21.

ment for our sin. To a soul, then, thus really repenting, two objects only fill the whole field of sight — God and himself. God all holy — of purer eyes than to look upon iniquity; and himself all stained, and soiled, and corrupted. The brightness of that holiness is what makes him see his own defilement. His sins shew black and loathsome on the dazzling whiteness of that perfect purity. He, in his own personality, he, the living fountain of being out of which all these acts of sin have sprung, is brought close to the Person of the holy God. The cry of his spirit is, “I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth Thee; wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes^b.” The separate acts of his sin are the least part of that which fills him with utter self-abasement, and yet *they* are multiplied and grown heinous in his sight as he never saw them before: secret sins, the sins of past years, the sins of his youth, the sins of his words, of his permitted thoughts, his sins of omission, his mixed motives, cold prayers, unbelieving communions, unrepentant confessions, resistances of grace, dryness under visitations, forgetfulness of good resolutions, want of thorough sincerity, all crowd upon him, all shew to his startled sight their hateful nature, until he is astonished at the horrible revelation. And yet even these are but as the least part of the

^b Job xlii. 6.

evil which he sees within himself; for he sees now something of that central curse of a will rebelling against God, of an utterly disordered nature, of which these separate acts are but the indications and the actings. But then with this self-abhorrance there is yet, through God's gift of grace, a reaching towards Him, the Holy One, for deliverance from himself, and from this evil. If it were not for this he would be in despair, and not in repentance; he would weep with Judas, not with Peter: but even with this terrible sight of God's holiness he sees bent on him,—as he is, in all his sin,—the aspect of an infinite mercy. Even with the excessive light of God's purity, there is "the rainbow round about the throne;" there is the assurance that "the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin:" and this, as it wins him to God for deliverance from himself, is that which more than anything besides breaks up the fountains of his soul into a flood of contrition. He sees the love against which he has rebelled, which he has slighted, which he has given up for the gratification of appetite, for the mire-wallowings of sense, for the self-satisfied chillness of his pride, for the wretched applause of his fellow-sinners, for the empty delusions of the world. The light of that love makes him see his sin, and that sight of his sin makes him see that love as he never saw them before: and so, to condemn himself, to magnify, if it were possible, his own guilt, to pluck from it every covering, every excuse, every palliation;

to breathe out "I have sinned against heaven and before Thee," and then to fly from this polluted self; to cast himself on that love; to seek for cleansing anyhow, by any suffering, through any anguish; to sob forth his "purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean, wash me and I shall be whiter than snow;" this is his only thought, his only desire; he dreams not of making terms, of making up for the past; all that he can utter is, "I am no more worthy to be called Thy son^c." Nay, he does not, in this full sight of the Holy One, see any punishment as utterly terrible save his own pollution and rebelliousness, and that parting of himself from the only centre of his being which must be its consequence, and so his entreaty is not "Punish me not for my sin, cast me not for it into the flames of hell," but it is "Create in me a clean heart, O God—renew a right spirit *within me*^d;" "Cast me not away from Thy presence, and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me^e."

Now, then, this being the essence of true repentance, it is manifest why, through God's mercy, it is the certain, as it is the only, road to salvation for every fallen soul. For it is this which brings that soul back to God; herein is its power. It is not that the smart of repentance has any virtue in itself; it cannot in its utmost intensity atone for one transgression; it cannot cleanse the soul from one stain of its inward corruption: so far from it, the mere anguish of conscious sin, unaccompanied by any

^c St. Luke xv. 19.

^d Ps. li. 10.

^e Ib. 11.

true turning to God for deliverance, is, when carried to its highest measure, the very worm which dieth not, the eternal self-gnawing of an undying spirit, which, in the full light of perfect purity, knows itself to be thoroughly unclean, and desires no cleansing, and so hates the purity whose everlasting rebuke is its infinite torment.

This, then, beloved brethren, being the essence of a true repentance, see wherein consists the distinguishing mark of that which I have called a half-repentance. It is in the lack of this one element, which is indeed essential to the salvation of the soul. It does not bring it to God for its cleansing and deliverance : and of this failure we may mark different causes.

As, first, the repentance of many men fails from its very feebleness : their souls are utterly shallow ; they have at times at least some compunctions for sin, but they are feeble, shortlived, easily healed, soon forgotten ; the wings of their spirit fail before they have borne them to the mount of God ; they fall like the flight of locusts, when the wind of passing feeling, which bore them for awhile on its strong breath, dies away, and where they fall they stay, and feed, and die, and corrupt. They are creatures of the earth, lifted up for a season by external accident, and then let fall again.

There is in these men no deep sense of the evil of sin, because no clear sight of it as God sees it ; and therefore there is no deep sense of corruption,

or of the need of an atonement, or of inward cleansing; they know nothing of such a state as that of the repentant king of Judah, when "Manasseh humbled himself *greatly* before the God of his fathers^f." Their soul never cried to the Lord, "wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes^g." Their repentance is a light work,—soon done with; a thing of the past, which early left them in an easy, respectable, earthly, unspiritual life,—unconverted, uncleansed, unrenewed, unsaved. They "knew not that they were miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked^h," and so they never did in earnest listen to the heavenly "counsel," and buy of Him who died for them "gold tried in the fire, that they might be like a white raiment, that they might be clothed, and that the shame of their nakedness might not appear."

Again, secondly, another cause is to be found in the love of this present world, which often possesses deeper souls with such a mastery and grasp. These are men of a wholly different class from the last. The lines of character are often marked deeply in them. There is in them no lack of earnestness: when, like Herod, they hear the voice of the preacher of repentance, they "observe" him, and "hear him gladly," and "do many thingsⁱ." But there is some Herodias whom they cannot sacrifice; there is some master sin, the sweetness of which they can-

^f 2 Chron. xxxiii. 12.

^h Rev. iii. 17.

^g Job xlii. 6. [†]

ⁱ St. Mark vi. 20.

not renounce. They are ready to give up everything else—the more ready because the making those sacrifices helps them to hide from themselves the destroying guilt of their retaining that which they cannot surrender, and so enables them to quiet conscience under the dim perception of their self-deceit, which will at times force itself on their notice. They have never learnt the prophet's repeated lesson upon this great characteristic of true repentance: "Repent and turn yourselves from your idols, and turn away your faces from all your abominations^k;" yea, "turn yourselves from your transgressions, so iniquity shall not be your ruin^l." The occasional struggles of such a soul are sometimes awful to witness. When conviction of sin is strong upon them, when the fear of God's judgments is heavy upon them, they will cry aloud for deliverance, as those who would obtain salvation at any cost. But the fever-fit of their ague-heat soon spends itself, and they are again as cold, and worldly, and sensual as if they had never known the terrors of the Lord:—"Their heart is divided; now shall they be proved faulty^m."

And there is another, and a very deadly state, to which, alas! not unfrequently both of these classes, though with some striking variations, are brought. For both of them are apt to substitute the adopting some form of religion for coming, through Christ the Mediator, in the reality of their own personal

^k Ezek. xiv. 6.

^l Ezek. xviii. 30.

^m Hosea x. 2.

being, to the personal God, for pardon, cleansing, and life eternal.

The first class, of weaker spirits, subside with a fatal facility into the mere external system of religion to which their antecedent habits, circumstances, or social relations predispose them; they become decent, and often careful, formalists, exact in their outward attendance on the means of grace, scrupulous to a nicety about their supposed orthodoxy, or partizan attendants on certain styles of preaching; they take in, and are well up in, their religious newspaper,—read with approbation the religious novels of their clique,—set their faces against all extremes,—are, to whatever extent implies no real self-denial, givers of money to all charitable works which are supported by their party, and thus cushion with the semblance of piety every rough corner of a godly life, and hide, even from themselves, the miserable weakness of their character,—its want of contrition, its want of all sight of God, of all love to Him, of all death to the world for Him,—in the decency of their formality, and the multitude of their petty acts of a seeming religiousness. Verily, these half-repentant religious lovers of this world are of those concerning whom the prophet speaksⁿ: “Thou wentest to the king with ointment, and didst increase thy perfumes, and didst send thy messengers far off, and didst debase thyself even unto hell.”

ⁿ Isa. lvii. 9.

Different, indeed, from these, but not the less truly unreal, so far as regards the true reality of life, is the end of that robuster class of minds of which I have spoken. Their half-repentance, their clinging to some form of sin, outward or inward, to some lust, or to some sin of the tongue, or to their own self-will, or to the world, equally keeps them from God: for Whom they often substitute a fanatical zeal for certain doctrines, or severe austerities, or occasional bursts of agonizing and convulsive earnestness, or an absorbing devotion of all these powers to some external system of religion, whilst a scorning tongue, or an unhumbled will, or lack of truth, or unconquered lusts, mark them still as afar from Him. Surely such are depicted in the burning words of Isaiah^o: "He feedeth on ashes: a deceived heart hath turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand?"

But again, thirdly: another cause of half-repentance is its springing only from the present pain or future fear, of punishment, and not from that compunction which only the sight of the love and mercy of Him against whom we have sinned can breed in the soul. Sinners, indeed, are through God's mercy often awakened to the first beginnings of repentance by the fear of His judgments. But there must be another sight, even the sight of His love, before the work can be accomplished. A deep

^o Isa. xliv. 20.

repentance must root itself in love. The terrors of the Lord may strike Saul to the earth, but it must be the revelation of the countenance of Christ which leads him to cry out, "Lord, what wouldst Thou have me to do?" And the reason of this is plain. A man may be tormented by present or terrified by the future consequences of a sin which he still loves. God's burning judgments, or the terrors of conscience, may be to such an one no more than are the bars of his prison to the caged wild beast; they keep him from gratifying his lust, but they only augment the savage rebellion of his heart. There is manifestly in these cases no hatred of sin as sin;—take away the bars, and the evil beast, unchanged in nature, would spring at once upon his victim: there is no drawing nigh to God for salvation; there is but the trembling of the cowardly hater beneath the lash of superior power.

Oh, beloved brethren in Christ, what an awful light does this throw upon many death-bed, and upon too many life-long, repentances. How many a cry for mercy in that hour of agony is only the howl of the unrenowned nature under the whip, not the turning of the heart to God. How many a seemingly changed life is nothing more than a selfish avoidance of the experienced penalties of wrongdoing, and not a daily and hourly drawing nigh to the God of mercy, through Jesus Christ, for pardon, and to the God of grace for renewal, through the working of His Holy Spirit.

What is such a fear of sin as this but the present trembling of the devils ? what is it but a prophecy of their awful future ? for, common as it is, what must be the end of going from this state of trial into that other world with such an incomplete repentance, but the passing with a heart and will fixed in active rebellion against Him, into an eternity of the manifested presence and power of the Almighty ; seeing Him to hate Him, because the lost soul sees Him at once to be all-powerful and ever-present, and yet an eternal contradiction of that which, in spite of His love in redemption, it has made itself to be.

Here, then, we may see the essence, and some of the causes, of half-repentance. It does not bring the soul to God ; and so, beginning in self and ending in self, there is in it no deliverance for man's spirit. And this may shew us its special curse. For not only does it *not* bring men to God, and so to salvation, but in unnumbered cases it hinders their being brought to Him. It enables them to quiet conscience ; it stands close beside them, watching for their soul, like some gibbering devil transformed for their destruction into an angel of light, the hateful and delusive counterfeit of that which might have saved them.

And this danger is all the more fearful, because, by the ordinary laws of God's providential government, this half-repentance must bring with it many present advantages which tend to blind the eyes of

self-deceivers. Thus did Saul's half-repentance lead to his being honoured by God's prophet before the elders of his people, and so really harden him for that black despair which closed in upon his miserable life. Thus did Ahab's half-repentance put off the day of reckoning, whilst it left him self-sold to work wickedness and to perish. Thus, doubtless, did the trembling of Felix seal him to perdition; and thus daily does the respectability which waits upon a half-repentance; its severing men from the outward horrors of sin; its improvement of their earthly condition; the respect of others which it secures; the character of moderation, of a supple self-adjustment to the claims of decent society, with nothing individual, or apparently excessive about it, which it imparts to the whole life; thus daily do these outward advantages of this hollow half-deceit blind the eyes; and cause the everlasting ruin of souls for which Christ died.

Surely, then, beloved brethren, with such a danger ever beside us,—with earthly hearts ever ready, through their own frailty, to shrink aside from the spirituality and severity of a true repentance,—with the effects of this low tone stamped everywhere on society around us,—with these outward advantages of unreality ever ready to deceive us,—and with so vast a stake as eternity hanging on the issue, surely it becomes us to examine closely, yea, even sharply, and that specially on this very day of Ash-Wednesday, into the quality of our own repentance.

What, then, are the signs whereby we may detect within ourselves the existence of this evil?

They are not far to seek, nor difficult to carry away, or to apply to ourselves. Oh, brethren in Christ, may God grant that we may indeed seek so to use them this very night upon our knees before God, as to bring us, if it be so, for the first time, to a true repentance. They are such as these:—

I. When our sorrow for sin centres itself mainly upon the painful or disgraceful consequences which have followed from it, rather than on the sin itself; when we grieve for the loss of health, or character, or opportunity, which it has brought in its train, rather than because it has been committed against God; and so when our sorrow is rather a flying from the punishment of sin than from the sin itself. How is this marked for us in the record of Saul's repentance under Samuel's stern and public reproof! He says, "I have sinned:" there is, indeed, the admission of guilt, but it is a bare admission, and from it his eye glances instantly to the earthly consequences of his sin; and to be delivered from them, and not from the sin itself, is the eager, restless effort of his soul. "I have sinned," is his cry, "yet honour me, I pray thee, before the elders of my people, and before Israel:" and to see how much this *is* a betrayal of the hidden unsoundness of an unconverted heart, compare it with David's conduct under a like reproof, accompanied also with a fearful

° 1 Sam. xv. 30.

sentence of suffering, which yet only drew from him the cry, "I have sinned against the Lord"; or in the words in which the 51st Psalm expresses the same utterance of his heart: "Against Thee, Thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight¹." This one thought possessed him; not, This is a grievous sentence; my punishment is heavy—how shall I escape from it? but, "I have sinned against the Lord," against the God of Grace, the Lord of Love, against Him who is my portion and my hope. Everything else but this seems for the time banished from his recollection by the greatness of this one conviction. Family suffering, the sword never departing from his house, shame before his people, all from which the heart naturally shrinks the most sensitively,—all were as nothing compared with this one thought, "I have sinned against the Lord;" and so, instead of seeking, with Saul, to have his sin concealed, he declares, "I acknowledge my transgression"; and again, "I acknowledged my sin unto Thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid²." And his cry is, not, Release me from my sentence, but "Cleanse me from my sin." "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." Not, Cover my sin from the sight of my people, but "Hide *Thy* face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me³."

² 2 Sam. xii. 13.

¹ Ps. li. 4.

³ Ibid.

² Ps. xxxii. 5.

¹ Ps. li. 7, 9, 10.

Here, then, is a first sign ; and connected with this, and implying the same faultiness of heart, though not in so signal a degree, is the fearing rather the punishment of sin hereafter, in the world to come, as a punishment, than grieving for it as that which, because it separates us from God, is now, and must be hereafter, its own greatest punishment. So that though, as I have said when treating of the causes of half-repentance, the fear of hell, and the flying from the wrath to come, through God's goodness and the power of His grace, leads many on from itself to true repentance, yet is it not safe to rest in that first stage, or until it is our chiefest grief that we have sinned against God : for then only can we indeed see the true evil of sin, or learn through the teaching of His Holy Spirit to hate and abhor it. So, again, is it a sign of evil when we make excuses for our sin, saying with Adam, "The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree and I did eat"; or with Saul, "I constrained myself, and offered sacrifice;" or, "I feared the people, and obeyed their voice^x." How different from the utterance of that great type of penitents, King David, whose "heart smote him after that he had numbered the people, and he said unto the Lord, I have sinned greatly in that I have done : and now I beseech Thee, O Lord, take away the iniquity of Thy servant, for I have done very foolishly^y,"

^x Gen. iii. 12.^x 1 Sam. xv. 24.^y 2 Sam. xxiv. 10.

—where there is no whisper of excuse, but a calm, solemn sitting down under the burden of his guilt, with a simple cry to the Almighty Absolver to release him from it.

And so from this we are led to another sign of this evil, which is when our sorrow is short-lived, —when it rests only in the feelings, and so passes away with their natural ebb,—when it dries up like summer streams, with the removal of the passing storm of fear, or of the punishment which our sin brought with it,—when it leads to no new acts of revenge against sin, to no life of greater watchfulness, to no turning to God and “doing works meet for repentance^{*},”—when, like Felix, we tremble under God’s word, but let the beginning of a new life wait for “a more convenient season ;” or when we forget easily our greater acts of sin, instead of bringing them again and again before God, in our more solemn acts of penitential contrition, lamenting over them as our shame and our reproach, even when we may trust that their guilt has been washed away in the blood of the Lamb ; even as he to whom the message had come, “The Lord hath put away thy sin,” could yet say “My sin is ever before me,” and “The shame of my face hath covered me.”

And, once more, it is a bad sign when our sorrow for sin rests in, and is as it were satisfied with, itself, instead of driving us simply again and again to the

* Acts xxvi. 20.

Cross of Christ, and to His Blood for our atonement. For this assuredly argues in us an insufficient estimate of what sin is ; and so it must be, since never save beneath the Cross can we see its hatefulness,—never, save when clinging most simply to the blessed words, “The Blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin,” can we bear to look our guilt calmly in the face, and see how greatly we have offended.

Here, then, are five of the chief signs of this deadly evil for our use in self-examination ; and in a searching self-examination is to be found the first steps towards our cure. For a half-repentance evermore shelters its true character from our sight amidst the mists of self-partiality, bred in our souls by our grievous self-love. Men seem to themselves to be indeed drawing nigh to God, when in truth they have but begun to make a few feeble steps towards Him. They quit vices which cause them outward shame, and even inward horror, and then comparing themselves, not with the Gospel standard of what they ought to be, but with the wretched standard of what they were, they become satisfied with their condition, when it ought to fill them with anguish. We must therefore indeed search, in God’s sight, into the very ground of our hearts, if we would be safe ; we must fear nothing so much as being flattered and deceived ; we must take time, and go deliberately over the record of our greater transgressions solemnly,

and in words confessing them to God ; we must really sift our consciences ; try our good as well as our bad actions ; see whether they are really done to please God, or to please ourselves. And herein we must be on our guard against the certain temptation of shrinking from seeing how bad we are. We must endure this sight, that we may more simply confide to God the miracle of changing us. Like the publican, we must be willing to be even confounded by the sight of our misery. For never will our repentance be thorough and deep, unless, losing sight of all virtue, or fancied virtue, in ourselves, we simply gather up the whole utterance of our spirit into one burst of supplication to our crucified Saviour, of " Lord, save me ; I perish."

Here, then, is the first step towards our cure ; and the second is this,—that we seek indeed for the gift of loving God. The love of God gives to the soul a profound humiliation of spirit, which is at the same time peaceful and untroubled. It enables us to gain that great attainment towards the growth of the Divine life within us, the preferring holiness to comfort ; and as this is developed within us, our repentance will deepen and grow more real ; and we shall advance towards that perfection of penitence, in which, whatever suffering God sends us, even though it be the most intense which our souls can know, is borne as less than we have deserved, is seen to be from God, and so is endured with an entire submission of the will as to its continuance,

from a fear of disturbing God's work, or resisting in anything His grace.

A third instrument of our cure is to go simply to Christ the Lord, and seek from Him the gift of penitence. This is, we must ever remember, the gift of God, the working of His grace. He must work in us the penitence which He accepts from us. Christ was "exalted to give repentance and remission of sins^a." "Surely," says Ephraim, when he indeed "bemoaned himself" before God, "after that I was turned, I repented^b." Where else but at the feet of Christ did the woman that had been a sinner, learn that deep sorrow for her sin which He so lovingly accepted? where else shall we learn it? where and how shall our cold, hard hearts be broken, but beside Him,—but in gazing on Him,—but by seeing in Him the wounds which sin, which our own sin, has made? By what, but by His "turning and looking upon" us, shall our hearts, harder than Peter's when he denied Him, be melted into the bitter tears of a true repentance?

Yea, beloved brethren, ~~HERE~~ must be our cure. Let this night see us in very deed seeking after Him; leaving all earthly helps, and casting ourselves on Him; yea, and following on until indeed we find Him. Then, and not till then, all secondary aids will help us forward. Without this true seeking after Him, without this casting ourselves simply on His grace, without this clinging to His Cross, secondary helps turn often, through our self-

^a Acts v. 31.

^b Jer. xxxi. 19.

deceit and waywardness, into the worst of hindrances. Self-consciousness and self-dependence, in their more subtle forms, turn all outer means into evil, and so we suck poison instead of drawing life from them. Unless the Cross of Christ and His one sacrifice for sin be kept evermore first and foremost before us, self-love is but nourished in us by good works, and austerities, and mortifications; but to the soul which indeed comes beneath His Cross, indeed cries to Him for brokenness of heart, indeed seeks that His Spirit should work repentance in it, these outer means also in their proper place become helps, and often great ones. To such souls, Lenten abstinence, the opening of troubles which we cannot still to God's minister, the self-revenges bred by love, larger and more self-denying offerings to the poor of Christ, and to His work, all aid in carrying on the blessed transformation. All, through the mighty grace of Christ our Lord, deepen and make more real within us the work of penitence, until, in God's time, the heart is purified thoroughly, and the mighty Absolver reveals Himself, saying, as He said of old of Joshua the high-priest to the accusing Satan, "Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire? . . . And unto him He said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment^c."

^c Zech. iii. 2, 4.

THE LORD'S TEMPTATION.

A SERMON,

PREACHED IN

THE CHURCH OF ST. MARY-THE-VIRGIN,
OXFORD,

ON FRIDAY, FEB. 27, 1857.

BY

ARCHIBALD CAMPBELL, 
LORD BISHOP OF LONDON.

OXFORD,

AND 377, STRAND, LONDON:

JOHN HENRY AND JAMES PARKER.

M DCCCLVII.



A SERMON,

8c.

ST. LUKE iv. 13.

“ And when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from Him for a season.”

EACH account of the Lord's temptation in the Gospels is marked by its own peculiarities. From considering these we may gain some useful thoughts illustrative of the nature of all temptation: e. g. there is the well-known difference of order in St. Matthew and St. Luke, which is supposed to shew that each of these Evangelists wished, or was commissioned, to bring his own lesson forward: St. Luke shewing the gradually ascending scale in the order of temptation, from appetite to pride; St. Matthew marking how Christ, in His resistance of temptation, taught His disciples that the great powers with which, like Himself, they were endowed, were never to be used arbitrarily for their own purposes; either, first, to satisfy their own wants; or, secondly, to recommend their mission by some startling display different from God's quiet mode of working; or, thirdly, still less far subjecting the earth to a worldly Christian dominion. At present, however,

let us note slighter differences. St. Matthew closes his account thus ^a: "Then the devil leaveth Him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto Him." St. Mark says ^b: "He was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted of Satan; and was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered unto Him." St. Luke, in the text: "And when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from Him for a season."

St. Matthew, then, mentions the presence of the angels; St. Mark, the wild beasts; St. Luke says that the devil's departure was only for a season.

Now I have no wish to-night to examine the accounts of the Lord's temptation critically. We need not attempt to settle how the tempter came; whether in actual, tangible form, or in a vision, or merely by the suggestion of dangerous thoughts, as he so often manifests his busy, mischievous presence amongst ourselves. To settle these points may be difficult, or impossible; for no one except the Lord Himself and His antagonist knows, or ever knew, more of the matter than we read in the three short accounts of the three Gospel writers referred to. No human eye watched the Lord Jesus when He went through His struggle; the angels came at the end, when the conflict was over; and the senseless wild beasts are mentioned as having looked on, only that we may understand more readily the awful solitude into which He was

^a Chap. iv. 11.

^b Chap. i. 13.

withdrawn from all human spectators, when He thus grappled with the arch-enemy. And no doubt what we read in these three Gospels is the only remaining record of what He Himself told His disciples of this struggle, perhaps, during those other forty days when He lingered with them on earth after His resurrection, and gave them fuller instruction than they had received before in the mysteries of His nature and His kingdom. The rays of light which came from that heavenly discourse might be slightly refracted as they passed through the human medium of each narrator's mind; and hence the slight differences in detail to which we can point: each of which differences or variations, thus viewed, will be found to be full of meaning, as illustrating what part in the narrative each Evangelist would have us dwell on. Yet through all these variations there is here, as elsewhere in the Gospels, that essential unity of truth which the Lord secured by His Holy Spirit when He promised to guide His disciples into all truth.

And now, for the present, we may regard the one truth coming from the three Evangelists as standing before us thus: Christ (the Son of Man), full, as we read, of the Holy Ghost (for thus St. Luke speaks of Him^c at the beginning of his account of the temptation,—“And Jesus, being full of the Holy Ghost, returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness,”)—Christ, then, the Son

^c Chap. iv. 1.

of Man, full of the Holy Ghost, though the good angels were at hand to minister to Him—even in the depths of solitude, away from all haunts of men or solicitations of the ensnaring world without—was still from without tempted by some evil influence ; (I say from without, for the whole lesson of the narrative proclaims this, quite irrespectively of the impossibility we find in supposing that evil, seducing thoughts could spring up from within the pure and holy breast of the Son of God ;)—Christ, the Son of Man, we repeat, full of the Holy Ghost, and with the angels at hand to minister to Him, even in the depths of solitude was tempted by some evil influence from without ; and this temptation, though repelled and vanquished, still left Him only for a season, and was ready, as occasion offered, to return upon Him again with the same subtlety, though it might be in a new form, as long as life lasted. This is the picture of the Lord's struggle which a comparison of the particular points we have now noted in the three narratives may set before us, to guide our thoughts this evening.

Nothing can more clearly illustrate than this, how man is, from his very nature, subject to temptation so long as his mortal life lasts, and must continue to be so till the final victory is achieved by Christ utterly destroying the power of evil. Give him the purest, holiest heart,—for such, certainly, was the heart of Christ ;—give him the aid of good spiritual influences of every kind in full measure ;

withdraw from him the seductions of society, still mysterious evil influences from without are powerful to entice him. We all know how the histories of hermits in the old days, fantastic and incredible as may be the guise of fable with which they have been invested, bear witness to this truth, so far, at least, as the history of men of mixed, imperfect character can enable us to distinguish between evil thoughts springing up from within, or sent into us from evil influence without. We know also how the private spiritual history of each of ourselves bears witness, in its degree, to something of the same kind; for when our holiest times of each day, and our efforts after earnest prayer, are interrupted, as they are continually, by a strange and unaccountable current of vain or wicked thoughts, does not this remind us of the tempter whispering wickedness into the ear of sleeping Eve? And so when more lengthened seasons, which we have earnestly desired to dedicate to strict watchfulness, and to a more than usually near walk with God,—as I do trust many of us have desired to dedicate this Lent on which we are now entering,—become for us, we know not how, seasons of peculiar difficulty, and, in proportion as we are watchful, our soul's enemy, sin, seems to be more watchful too—and many a good resolution is only formed to be broken very miserably; I think we shall see much in our own experience, if we look at the matter carefully, to strengthen the lesson of this narrative, that neither

the evil of our own hearts within, nor of a wicked world surrounding us, exhausts all the sources of temptation and danger ; but that there is a strange evil power,—call him what you will, Devil, Satan, Tempter, or by the more philosophic-sounding, though less really philosophic name, of Evil Influence,—which, like a roaring lion, goeth about seeking whom to devour. This influence often greatly shakes the watchful, and may ruin the unwary, by hurrying them, in a moment, to sins of frightful dye, from the effects of which all their life long they can never after extricate themselves ; though, perhaps, a very short time before they fell, they would not have supposed their falling to be possible. I believe, certainly, that a well-considered theory of human nature will allow three sources of man's spiritual danger ; not only an evil heart within, and evil company in the world without, but also an evil spirit, a personal evil being, watching to betray. Certainly this is the teaching, not only of the narrative now before us, but of the whole Bible, from the first of Genesis to the twenty-second of Revelations.

No marvel, then, that man should be exposed to temptation all his mortal days. The best man that ever lived since the fall has remained ever subject to conflict, till death, through his Lord's mercy, placed him in safe-keeping. Therefore, let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed, and pray for strength from above,—all that strength which the

Lord had in His temptation; a full measure of grace, and the help, if it may be, of blessed spirits; a ready command and application of the rules of God's Word; and a will strengthened by God Himself, that, like the Son of God, he may come forth uninjured from the dangerous conflict. It has been man's lot to be exposed to great temptation ever since the fall. Nay, was there not temptation before the fall, when man seemed to have, and comparatively with our present misery certainly had, nothing either around him or within him but what was very good and holy? Of course there was temptation before the fall, or man could never have fallen. So very truly is it part of man's nature, ever since he was created, to be liable to temptation. Even when the two other sources of danger seem wanting, there remains this third source,—the unknown evil influence, the evil one watching to destroy us from without. These are obvious, trite lessons from the record brought before us.

My friends, let us pause here. Shall not you and I, looking forward now calmly at this time, when we are invited to quiet self-recollection,—looking forward to life's dangers—knowing how thickly we are beset with evil—evil that assumes a thousand alluring forms, varying according to our varying ages and tempers,—shall not you and I, looking forward and almost trembling, acknowledge how very great blessings they are that have been secured to us in the Lord Jesus Christ? If we are faithful to

Him in heart, He who met the tempter single-handed in the wilderness will be ever near, strengthening us when we are hard pressed. Master this thought, I beseech you. Amid the allurements of pleasure, remember His awfully pure presence, and know that He is by your side.

And again, think of this moreover,—a great cause of thankfulness to the Lord Jesus,—it is not in life only, while danger lasts, that we have to thank Him ; we shall soon, if we are faithful, be beyond the reach of temptation,—a blessing this, which even our un-fallen nature did not enjoy. And we owe it to our Redeemer, who has created us anew : here is a great comfort to help us to endure while we are exposed to trial. The Lord Jesus, who in His own person vanquished the tempter, has made the state after death this sure refuge, impervious to temptation—a far better state than that in which we were before the fall. Even over the picture of Eden itself there does not shine that calm light of perfect peace which the Lord Jesus Christ sheds on the abode of those who have passed, in His faith and fear, out of this stormy life into His own presence, beyond the reach of temptation.

As the Lord Jesus is in this narrative of the temptation set before us as resisting and defeating our great enemy, so the faithful Christian soul will ever look to Him direct both for strength in this life, and rest from all trials in the life to come. To Him, to Christ direct ; for it is of the very essence

of the real Gospel to bring each faithful, burdened, trembling soul direct to Him without intervening mediation. The Lord who died for us, who washes our souls freely in His precious blood, who loves us with an everlasting love, is ready to guard you and me in temptation, and He has opened up to us the hope of reaching speedily a peaceful haven where we can never more be tempted.

What a soothing thought is this as to our friends who sleep in Jesus: for them the world's rough blasts blow harmless now, through Christ's mercy; the raging of the Evil Spirit cannot reach them. Long before they mount, when the end approaches, to the bright heaven of God—even in that separate state where Christ keeps them now, they are secure for evermore from every fear or danger. Satan cannot enter where they are now: and consider how, if he looks wistfully into that peaceful fold, he must see that even if he could enter amongst them, he could not creep into their hearts. In all the forms in which temptation assailed the Lord, they are armed as He was; and we shall soon be as free from trial as they, if we are faithful. The blessed dead can no longer know temptation from the weakness of their bodily appetites; they hunger no more, neither thirst any more. There is nothing in worldly power or splendour now to dazzle them, or fill them with those uneasy longings which so torment many of us here; for Christ fills their whole hearts, and in His presence there is peace

and satisfaction. Neither can there be any pride to vex them, for their congenial occupation is to contemplate and acknowledge His perfection, while every proud thought of self is swallowed up in love of Him. We know even here how devotion to a great and good human character cures us of pride : and in Him, in Christ, all greatness and goodness is concentrated, while the redeemed soul loves and honours Him with perfect devotedness. So that in souls thus redeemed there can be no room for temptation, nothing for the tempter to catch at, even if he could, which he cannot, approach their peaceful abode. It is soothing, I say, as to ourselves, and our friends resting in Christ, to think how every form of temptation which Christ endured—and He repelled it in every form—appetite, ambition, pride—have for ever ceased, through His mercy, and in consequence of His victory, to vex the saints in rest. The saints in rest are guarded : Satan cannot come at them : he dare not shew himself in the presence of Him who has for ever vanquished him. Their hearts also offer no opening to him, and besides, there are no evil men around them to help him. They are safe as Christ Himself, and safer, if we may say so, than He was in the days of His flesh ; safe from temptation, as from sorrow, for evermore.

It is a cheering prospect which the Lord Jesus has opened up for us, encouraging us to pray, "Lead us not into temptation." He encourages us,

while we contemplate the narrative of His temptation, to hope for strength here when we are tempted, and to look forward with assured hope to a state in which human nature, fallen or unfallen, was never placed before, where there can be no temptation.

Such thoughts may well be called up, comparing the certainty of our human nature being exposed to temptation all the days of our flesh, with the assured hope that it escapes from temptation when the soul comes to its rest in Jesus.

But to return to the narrative before us. When the devil had ended all the temptations, he departed from Him for a season,—for a season: we know to what this points. Christ in the days of His flesh may have had, and doubtless had, many other conflicts; but as His mortal life drew to a close, the struggle deepened. It is right to understand these words, “for a season,” as pointing to the return of trial on the solemn night of the agony. It is a trite saying, that as Satan in the outset of Christ’s ministry would have allured Him with desire, so at its close he endeavoured to gain his wicked end by fear. Fear of death has often been a snare to Christ’s people. It may be a snare in some day of weakness of mind or languor of body to each one here; but to Christ Himself it could not be death alone which on that night was held forth as terrible; rather was it, as is always said, the unknown and incomprehensible misery which pressed upon a perfectly pure soul from the

contemplation of sin and its many penalties. But the point which I would have you observe at present is,—not the nature and appalling weight of Christ's sufferings in His second recorded temptation on the night of the agony—rather, what we have in common with Him, in this ; that though the tempter may leave us for a time, while we are borne up by the good Spirit of God to resist him, he will return again with some new variety of trial, taking advantage of our weak moments, when unexpected circumstances may have made our defence, as it would seem, less easy. Christ drove back this second recorded onset of temptation by prayer, by the perfect devotion of the heart to the Father, which is the very essence of faithful prayer,—“Nevertheless, not My will, but Thine.” Faithful prayer, in perfect submission of the soul to God, will be the sure defence in our worst trials. In the Lord's case, Satan changed his assault from appeals to appetite, ambition, spiritual pride, which he had made at first, to fear: he will be ready to change them in any way which seems likely to reach and smite our weakness.

We to-night are met here together of various ages, conditions, temperaments—of various intellectual powers. Who shall enumerate the thousand forms in which temptation may assail us? So different at different periods of our lives, that what seemed at one time in nowise formidable, threatens at another to make shipwreck of us. Be quite sure

that as we change, temptation changes. Have you, in the days of your youth and strength, intensely desired any object of worldly distinction, or other worldly good? has God given it to you at last? and has that disturbance of the heart which springs from uneasy longings, and always carries much trial with it, ceased? Do not think because you are thus at rest, that you are in safety. It is only that one stage of temptation is ended. God knows how you have borne yourselves while it lasted. That struggle now is a thing past, and must bear its fruit, unchanged as the past is unchangeable. What more striking, when we revisit old scenes, than the thought how much the interests of life have changed since of old we frequented those same scenes. The old desires and old temptations are gone—past all return—but the effect remains unchangeable, and the old have only given way to new temptations. It is but that some new stage of trial has begun; and you will require all your alertness, and all the help which springs from earnest prayer, and keeping near to God through Christ, if you are not to be entangled in some new snare. All changes are in this respect like the change from youth to manhood, and decline. Youth's warm appetites or dreamy longings are succeeded by manhood's worldly ambition, and both by the sluggishness of age. Are there not peculiar temptations in each period, from which nothing but the Holy Spirit of God can defend us? The tempter leaves us but for a season. Alas! as we advance in

life, our growing strength of body and of intellect is but a growth into new phases in which new temptations may assail; and our decline in life but a sinking into fresh liabilities to trial, from the failure of our vigour. And never let us forget the intensity which the Bible system of human nature ascribes to temptation, by representing all our trial from weakness within and bad men without, as aided and abetted by the unseen presence and activity of a personal spirit of evil.

My friends, let these common lessons from the Lord's temptation not be set aside by any of us. We are all in danger, great danger,—God knows how great! but the Lord Jesus Christ, the sharer of our earthly trials, is at hand—the kind and watchful Friend. If we are in earnest, we cannot fail, however tempted, with two great thoughts fixed in our hearts,—first, the thought that we have forgiveness for the past through Christ's death, and secondly, that we enjoy nearness to God and strength through Christ's assured presence with the faithful.

SELF-DECEIT.

A SERMON,

PREACHED IN

THE CHURCH OF ST. MARY-THE-VIRGIN,

OXFORD,

ON WEDNESDAY, MARCH 4, 1857.

BY

WALTER FARQUHAR HOOK, D.D.,

VICAR OF LEEDS.

OXFORD,

AND 377, STRAND, LONDON:

JOHN HENRY AND JAMES PARKER.

M DCCC LVII.



A SERMON,

&c.

ISAIAH xlii. 18, 19.

“Hear, ye deaf; and look, ye blind, that ye may see. Who is blind, but My servant? or deaf, as My messenger that I sent? who is blind as he that is perfect, and blind as the Lord’s servant?”

THE figure of speech here employed by the prophet is of frequent occurrence in holy Scripture.

St. Paul, when addressing those who would not believe in Jesus, exclaimed, “Well spake the Holy Ghost, by Esaias the prophet, to our fathers, saying, Go to this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive^a.” And a greater than St. Paul had employed a similar expression: with reference to the Jews, our Lord had said, “In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive^b.”

These warnings are addressed, be it observed, to those who possessed the light, and were capable of employing their eyes; their not doing so being

^a Acts xxviii. 26.

^b Matt. xiii. 16.

the very ground of the censure ;—whose ears were sensible of sound, but who, nevertheless, were both deaf and blind.

It is in the moral as in the physical world : there are many who can gaze with rapture upon the beautiful and sublime in a landscape, but from whom is hidden, for want of a microscope, the nicer mechanism of nature ; and the Physician of Souls does not deny that we may have an ear to take in the sweet strains of music,—He would only remind us that we must apply the stethoscope, if we would ascertain with accuracy the workings of the inner man.

The prevailing sins when Isaiah wrote were idolatry and hypocrisy : some there were who openly forsook the worship of Jehovah, or, if they renounced idolatry, sympathised with idolaters ; and in others, against whom the prophet had frequent occasion to raise his warning voice, he saw the germs of an unconscious hypocrisy, which, after the return from the captivity, developed itself into Pharisaism.

Turning from those who had so often vexed his righteous soul, the prophet fixed his eye more steadily on the future. He had not only eyes to see the Invisible, and ears to catch the sounds of heaven ; to him, in holy vision, the future was made manifest. He could dwell with delight upon that higher dispensation, for which the Mosaic dispensation was clearing the way ; he beheld the Church of Christ, in its Head and its members,

—in its design, its origin, its progress, its vicissitudes,—in its various relations to God and man.

But still the future came to him as the distant to one who looks through a telescope ; the striking lineaments were visible, but not the minute details. He looked as a traveller might be supposed to gaze from a distance at this city : it was a vision of beauty and splendour ; but all that was to occur within the walls he could not perceive. He beheld the Church glorious,—in its increased light ; under the freedom of the Gospel instead of the restraints of the Law ; and in the fulness of the grace which attends its ordinances. He consoled his own soul, and the souls of the faithful few who were hanging for consolation on his words, by describing what he saw. He saw men serving the Lord ; he saw them, God's messengers, in every part of the world, proclaiming the glad tidings of salvation ; he saw a Messiah come, an accepted atonement, a sanctified people ; he saw them perfect, as far as light was concerned, thoroughly furnished unto every good work.

We may imagine him about to exclaim, There will be no need, in those happy times, of the warnings which I have been so frequently commissioned to address to the children of Israel ; when, lo ! his ears as well as his eyes were opened, and he heard the Spirit of God, speaking, in a voice which is to sound till time shall be no more, "Hear, ye deaf ; and look, ye blind, that ye may see." Can this exhortation still be needed, he seemed to ask ? Yes,

saith the Spirit, for even My servants are blind, even the messengers that I sent,—even the perfect, yea, even My servant.

And therefore, my brethren, even now must the preacher of the Gospel give utterance to the warning, “Hear, ye deaf; and look, ye blind, that ye may see;” still must the warning be addressed, not to the nominal Christian only, but to those also who are serving the Lord; still must they be warned against what are still the besetting sins of the Church, idolatry and hypocrisy: idolatry and hypocrisy, the sins not only of the openly profane, but too often of those who, though in one or both of these respects they offend, are unconscious of these sins, until they open their eyes to see, and their ears to hear, in the painful duty enjoined at this season of self-examination.

To unconscious idolatry in the first place, and to unconscious hypocrisy in the next place, I shall call your attention; reserving for the last place a recommendation of the course to be pursued, if we desire to obtain the only remedy—an honest and a good heart.

These will form the three heads of this discourse. And may He, by His Spirit, be present to our souls, who only can lighten our darkness; may the Searcher of Hearts say Ephphatha to *our* hearts, that we may listen to the reproaches of conscience, if our consciences be moved by the reflections which our subject will suggest.

I. And first of idolatry. The prevalence of ido-

latry in every age is a humiliating proof of our fallen nature, and it shews how Satan is, in truth, the prince of this world. Not only did the world in the patriarchal ages fall into idolatry, but even under the light of revelation ten tribes out of the twelve into which the Hebrew people were divided became idolatrous; worshipping Jehovah, indeed, but under idolatrous forms.

And we are compelled to make the same remark with reference to the major part of Christendom at the present time. Idolatry never had existence, if it does not exist in the Romish Church.

On the part of many it is, doubtless, an unconscious idolatry, as we gather from the indignation excited, when of idolatry they are openly accused; but still the fact remains the same,—the fact that worship is not directed exclusively to Him who declares Himself to be a jealous God, but is shared with the lords many and the gods many who are raised to the pedestals on which stood, formerly, the deities of the heathen world.

The fact we may not deny, and our only hope is that, as in the kingdom of the ten tribes the eye of the heart-searching God could see, what was imperceptible to Elijah—a hidden people to whom Divine mercy was extended; so, notwithstanding the idolatries of the major part of Christendom, God has still an invisible communion of saints, among whom He may occasionally raise up His prophets as in the times of *old*, and for whom a living Intercessor is pleading before the throne of mercy

“ Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

But although this circumstance could not be passed by without notice, it is only alluded to incidentally, since it is to the unconscious idolatry, too prevalent in the little kingdom of Judah, or in the Protestant Church, that our attention is, on the present occasion, to be especially directed. This is the idolatry to which we are tempted ourselves, and against which we are to be warned.

Born in a Protestant land, surrounded by Protestant associations and ideas, breathing the very atmosphere of Protestantism, and nurtured in a Church which is equally Protestant and Catholic, we are not likely to fall down before wood and stone, the work of men's hands, or to invoke any other name in our prayers but that of Jehovah only, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. So far as the grosser acts of idolatry are concerned, we are apt to apply the microscope so closely to the eye as to see, or think we see, seeds of idolatry in the most innocent, if not the most edifying, ceremonies ;—but what we have now to do is rather to take the stethoscope, that we may search and see how it is with our own hearts : we must open our ears to hear the Apostle, when he asks, “Thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege ?”

“ Know ye not,” asks St. Paul,—“ Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey° ?”

° Romans vi. 16.

This was the principle of Elijah, when he exclaimed to assembled Israel, "If the Lord be God, follow Him : but if Baal, then follow him."

He is our God whom we serve.

Who our God is becomes, then, a question which, in the midst of our zeal against the grosser forms of idolatry, we must pause to ask. Hear, ye deaf, and look, ye blind, that ye may see, for here there may be self-deceit.

Who is our God ?

The question is put to the servants and messengers of Jehovah ; to those who are regular in their devotions ; who are punctual in the performance of their duty ; who are, it may be, ascetic in their self-discipline, and profuse in their charities.

Who is our God ?

We must obtain our answer by ascertaining how we act where our worldly interests clash with what we regard as immediate duties to God.

It is not a question as to the performance of certain duties. That point is conceded. They are performed. The question is whether we seek *first* the kingdom of God and His righteousness, not whether we *serve* God ; many will do this in the *second* place : they will come to church when not inconvenient ; will be charitable when no self-denial is required ; will observe the Lord's Day when not allured to its desecration by business ;—the question, observe, is which is our *first* consideration,—Do we seek *first* the kingdom of God and His righteousness ?

It is often best to test ourselves in little things ; and an easy test may here be applied.

We each of us have some rule with reference to the observance of the Lord's Day. We may differ as to the amount of recreation to be allowed ; but we all in this country, if we have any sense of religion, regard it as a day from which we are to abstain from worldly business. As a general rule, we transact no business on that day ; but suppose that we happen to be more pressed by business than usual, suppose some urgent call arise ; conscience hesitates : which way do we decide ?

If religious duty yield to worldly business, whom are we serving ?

Be not deceived. See the case as it fairly stands. God calls one way, self calls another. If the Lord be your God, you will follow Him ; if you follow Him not, you are guilty of unconscious idolatry,—not Jehovah, but Self is your God.

This is so very obvious,—it is so obvious that those who do not make religion their *first* concern are not in reality serving God, that we have only to mention the fact to enable all who are not wilfully blind to see their danger, and to hear the voice of conscience when it saith “Thou art the man” to whom the Spirit speaketh in our text.

But the evil occurs in a yet more subtle form than this.

There are some who are most minute in all their religious observances ; who are alarmed beyond measure at any omission of duty, and who would

subject themselves to any amount of mortification when they have transgressed, in the slightest particular, any law they may have laid down for themselves, or which they may imagine to have been enacted by God; who have a quarrel with the Church of England because she refuses to prescribe the penances to which they are anxious to submit.

And she wisely refuses. For these persons are not the worshippers of that one and only God who, though He will by no means clear the impenitent, is a merciful receiver of all true penitent sinners, and who describes Himself as “The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin^d.”

They, with their one talent, say in effect to the Incarnate Son of God, “I fear Thee, because Thou art an austere Man: Thou takest up what Thou layest not down, and reapest that Thou didst not sow^e.”

Instead of encouraging them in their austerities, which is the Romish system, we should warn them that the God they worship is Self. They believe in a hell; they are overcome with an awful dread of the hell which they feel that they deserve; but if they could be assured that from hell they would escape, there is nothing in them to prevent their

^d Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7.

^e Luke xix. 21.

indulging self by a recurrence to the sins for which they seek in vain to make—what never can be made by man—an atonement.

We are compelled to act in a similar manner by another class of persons for whom the most tender sympathy must be always felt by Christian hearts ; those who are self-tormentors, because they are not sensible of the fervours of devotion in which they may, at one period, have found the holiest joy. The proof that the Divine grace is in them is to be sought in a consistent Christian walk ; and we must warn them of a lurking idolatry in their souls, when their chief object in religion is not a principle, but an enjoyment.

But how much more applicable are these remarks to the case of those who, like Jehu of old, have zeal without love ; who say, as Jehu said to Jehonadab, “ Come with me, and see my zeal for the Lord,” when their zeal is, in fact, nothing less than the indulgence of their envy, hatred, and malice. What do they more than serve their own vile passions, dignified by the name of Christian zeal, and worship an idol specious as Belial and cruel as Moloch ?

Or let us cast our eyes in an opposite direction : When, under the cant term of charity, God’s truth is sacrificed, is Jehovah the God of the pseudo-charitable ? Is not Self the god of those who, wishing to secure happiness in the next world as well as in this, while indulging in vices which disqualify them for a spiritual state, seek to purchase

heaven by their alms-deeds, or by death-bed benefactions ?

But so easy is it to apply the evil principle when once we have eyes to see it, that, instead of dwelling upon details, we will pass at once to the consideration of the only remedy.

The only remedy for unconscious idolatry is to be found in the realization of that which the prophets recognised as the distinguishing blessing, the peculiar characteristic, of the Christian dispensation. The promise to our dispensation is this :—“ A new heart will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you : and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and give you an heart of flesh[†].” In other words, we must never rest till we have obtained the gift for which at this season we especially pray—a new heart.

And then comes the question, What is the new heart ?

And this question we must answer by asking what is meant by the heart, speaking physically, and with reference to the body.

The heart of the body is that organ which propels the blood through the whole course of circulation : it is regarded as the source of all vital motion, and sustains organic life.

And applying the term figuratively to morals and to things spiritual, by the heart we mean the

[†] Ezek. xxxvi. 26.

master motive of human conduct. Ascertain the ruling motive of man, and you know his character.

The ruling motive of the natural man is self-gratification. He may have generous impulses, and, under their influence he will sometimes, in benevolent action, forget self; but still he is an unconscious idolater: his pervading, abiding, influencing motive is self-gratification.

The heart of a true Christian is love to God; a love to God which overflows in love to all the creatures of His hands, and does good to all men as God provides the opportunity.

It is thus that we learn to distinguish between religion and godliness.

The pagan and the Mahometan may be religious; and their religion evinces itself, not unfrequently, under forms with which we are familiar in the Christian Church,—in mysticism, asceticism, enthusiasm, and fanaticism. But godliness they cannot have; for they cannot love, because they do not know, the one and only God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

This is the God to whom the preacher of the Gospel invites men to turn; this is the God to whom the Church at this season directs us to pray, "Turn Thou us, O good Lord, and so shall we be turned."

Turn us how? By creating in us this new heart. And then we shall indeed be turned. "Old things will pass away; all things will become new." We

shall be new creatures. Not only will there be, as there must be, new feelings, new pursuits, new objects ; but old objects, pursuits, and feelings will receive a new aspect and direction. Not only will there be new power in the will, new purity in the imagination, new tenderness in the conscience ; but the eye will have new light to discern between good and evil ; the tongue will have a new taste to discriminate between bitter and sweet ; the ear will hear music in the sanctuary to which it was deaf before ; there will be new feet to the messenger of the Lord, a new hand to do His work, a new mouth to hymn His praise.

The old heart is the inheritance of the dying Adam ; the new heart is the gift of Him who is a quickening Spirit.

II. But every one is aware how prone is the nature of man to run from one extreme to another ; and hence it is, that no sooner has a man escaped from unconscious idolatry, than we too often find him involved in unconscious hypocrisy,—the subject which is in the second place to come under our notice.

Into unconscious hypocrisy men too often fall, because, after realizing a general idea of the new heart, they assume that heart to be what it really is not.

The new heart, though the *master* motive, is not the *only* motive to human action. The bodily heart is not the only bodily organ of which we are pos-

sessed, though without the heart every function of the body would cease.

So, although without the new heart we cannot be godly, and although the divine principle of the godly man will direct all his deliberate actions, and indirectly influence his whole conduct, yet we are not to ignore our inferior motives. On the contrary, it is by admitting and assigning to them their proper place that we become honest to ourselves, that we extricate true religion from the trammels of mysticism and fanaticism, and render it practical in its bearings upon the life which now is, as well as upon that which is to come.

We are born not only with certain appetites and affections, but also with certain desires.

To desire knowledge; to desire the esteem of others; to desire the society of those we esteem; to desire power; to desire superiority; all this is so natural to man, that without these desires man would become other than he is; he would cease to be a man.

And why are these desires given? The only reason that can be assigned is the obvious one, that they are intended to operate as our immediate motives of action.

The man who becomes godly is still a man, and it is as man that he is to serve God; it is, in other words, through the influence of these very motives that we are to act as the servants of the Lord.

What is required is, not their eradication, but their due subordination to the directing, predominant, overruling motive in all deliberate action.

The pious man must be prepared, if need shall be, to die a martyr's death ; but this does not imply that he is not to yield to the instinct of his nature, and to guard his life when it is attacked by the assassin's knife.

The pious man must be prepared to forgive injuries, but this does not imply that he is not to resent wrong, or to appeal from injustice to Cæsar.

The pious man will die a pauper rather than do what conscience condemns, but this does not imply that he is not by honest means to procure a livelihood.

He will be prepared, at the call of Providence, to preach, like St. John, in the wilderness ; but where he has the choice, he may enjoy the comforts of society.

The existence of the inferior motives does not of necessity interfere with the predominance of the master motive.

The master motive of the godless man is self-gratification, but this does not exclude the impulses of an occasional generosity, by yielding to which self is gratified ; and while our great motive has its influence not only in deliberate action, but indirectly upon the whole character of a true child of God, our immediate action may originate in a variety of other motives ; with respect to which our only care must

be that they do not interfere with the ultimate object which we have in view. Malice is so keensighted in detecting the faults of religious persons, and irreligion so gloats on the self-deceptions of the pious, that it is most important that we should bear these facts in mind.

Let us take one or two cases as a specimen.

Take the case of a minister of the Gospel diligently employed in some important cure, and to whom preferment is offered. How frequently do we find such a one, supposing it necessary that he should be influenced by the great motive only, assigning it as his only reason for accepting the new post of duty, that his sphere of usefulness will be enlarged. Irreligion smiles sarcastically as it suggests that, without an increase of income, or some accession of worldly honour, the new post would not have been accepted, or a place of sufficient usefulness have been forsaken.

There are others, laymen, honourably and usefully employed in the service of religion, who, men of mark and influence, under the excitement of those feelings which are the necessary result of the beatings of the new heart, devote their time to labours of Christian love. But among these, irreligion selects one here and there, and is not slow to observe that he is active only when he is permitted to take a lead ; that his pride revolts against acting a subordinate part ; that he is impatient of contradiction, open to flattery ; and that his charity slumbers

when, by superior authority, he is not permitted to dictate or to dogmatize.

In commercial life, the man of piety is ready to give, and glad to distribute. But in doing this, he is only one of a class which is pre-eminent for their public spirit, for generosity of character, and for their liberal expenditure. The merchants and manufacturers of this country form an aristocracy, which is deeply sensible of its responsibilities, and which, as the general rule, acts with princely munificence: in what way then, irreligion asks, is the man of piety to be distinguished among these? Irreligion follows him to the mart, the warehouse, and the mill, and beholds him as careful against imposition or extortion, as appetent of gain, as eager in his speculations, as the man who makes no profession of religion, but calls himself merely a man of the world.

It is the object and design of irreligion, while thus prying into the actions of piety, to insinuate that no real difference exists between him who is living without God in the world, and those who profess in all that they do to be under the influence and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The people of God are accused of hypocrisy. They are not hypocrites in the sense which their enemies attach to the word. They are conscious of no desire to deceive others; they are conscious of the existence in themselves of the master motive: but still there may be an unconscious hypocrisy;

they may deceive themselves by supposing, and by leading their accusers to suppose, that there is sin in the influence of the inferior motives ; and then, conscious of right intention, they may deny, even to themselves, a fact which to all except themselves is patent.

Honesty is the best policy in religion as in everything else : let there be an honest avowal of those motives which we find, on self-examination, to exist in our souls. Let us meet the enemy by shewing that they are only sinful when they occupy the first, instead of the second, place ; for here, again, we must apply the Scriptural principle of seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness : *first*,—which implies that other things may be also sought by those to whom the promise is, that godliness is profitable unto all things ; having the promise of the life which now is, as well as of that which is to come.

One of the incentives to great exertion is emulation, and to encourage in man the desire to excel, prizes are offered and honours conferred : all that we have to do in this respect is to be very careful that our desire to excel be not attended with feelings of envy towards those who have been more excellent or more successful than ourselves. So far from being sinful, emulation may improve our character, and, instead of retarding our spiritual progress, help us forward in the way we ought to go.

There is no sin in availing ourselves of the op-

portunities presented to us by Providence, of improving our worldly circumstances; though there is a great sin in pretending to be influenced by spiritual motives *only*, when, by opening our eyes, we might clearly see that worldly considerations have had some, and that a very proper, influence.

The love of power prevails, to a certain extent, even in the humblest mind; and it is as connected with this feeling that fortunes are accumulated. Those who are engaged in making money are often, so far as personal indulgences are concerned, among the most abstemious and moderate of mankind. To make money is their business: it is a calling as legitimate as any other; and in the exercise of this calling some of the highest faculties, both intellectual and moral, are called into exercise.

Now, instead of decrying these as mere worldly motives, and then deceiving ourselves by supposing that we are above their reach, let us, I repeat it, honestly admit their influence, and then direct our attention to that one practical point, their subordination to the new heart that is beating within us.

By professing one thing while we do another, we damage, as we have seen, the cause of religion, and we gradually deteriorate our own character. It is said by the poet,

“An honest man’s the noblest work of God;”

and this is true if we apply the saying not only to our dealings with others, but also to the examination of our own souls.

Hypocrisy in every shape is a lie: the hypocrisy of those who pretend to be more religious than they really are; the dastard hypocrisy of those who pretend to be less religious than they really are, and the hypocrisy by which we deceive ourselves. And recollect, when we call this last an unconscious hypocrisy, we do not clear the self-deceiver of sin; for his ability to deal honestly with himself is implied in the exhortation, "Hear, ye deaf; and look, ye blind, that ye may see. Who is blind, but My servant? or deaf, as My messenger? who is blind as he that is perfect, and blind as the Lord's servant?"

It is easily perceived how gradually unconscious hypocrisy may degenerate into unconscious idolatry, and the prayer, therefore, for the new heart is incessant; first that it may exist, and then that it may beat with healthy precision.

III. We are to pray for the creation of the new heart, because it is the special gift of God, who frequently affirms, "*I take away the stony heart.*" "*I give a new heart.*" "*I give a heart of flesh.*" "*I put a new spirit within you.*" "*I, even I, the most high God, do all these things.*"

And we are to pray with confidence, for our Lord has promised that to them that ask, and seek, and knock, the Spirit will be given by the Father.

But although the work is the work of the Holy Ghost; although we must have recourse to much, long-continued, and earnest prayer; although we

must be, not as men who carelessly make a request, but as those who urge a suit before the throne of grace ; yet we are to remember that the Holy Ghost operates through means ; and it is of the other means to which we must have recourse, if we really desire to obtain the distinguishing privilege of the Christian dispensation, that I propose now very briefly, in the last place, to remind you.

We must carefully perform what, next to increased earnestness of devotion, is the special duty of Lent. We must open our ears to hear, we must open our eyes to see, we must meditate upon the mercies of redeeming love.

We must contemplate a ruined world, and a God who is the Ruler, not of man only, but of all intelligent beings.

To all the subjects of the Divine dominions there is but one law,—obey and live. But this implies the converse ; and of disobedience, therefore, death must be the inevitable consequence.

Man, disobedient, became therefore a wretched, perishing creature, whose pardon was impossible, unless something were done which would render the pardon of man consistent with the maintenance of that law, in the maintenance of which the well-being of every subject of the Sovereign Ruler of the universe is involved ; for without that law the object of Satan would be obtained,—the will of the creature would prevail over the will of the Creator, and the universe would become a hell.

But the majesty of the Divine law was vindicated, as nothing else could vindicate it ; in the very relaxation of its penalties it was magnified ; when God Himself, in the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, became incarnate that He might be subject to it.

How are we lost, my brethren, in wonder, love, and praise, when we contemplate this Divine scheme by which infinite justice is reconciled with infinite mercy, and God proved to be to all His creatures—whether sinless, as in heaven, or penitent, as on earth—Love itself ; this scheme, devised in the councils of the sacred Three, carried into execution by the labours, the sufferings, the death of the Lord Jesus Christ, and brought home to the soul by the illuminating and sanctifying power of the Holy Ghost.

But the Church would, at this season, inflame our love yet further, by leading us on, from meditation on this fact, to the spiritual contemplation of the manner of its accomplishment, and of every detail of the Divine work as it was done here on earth.

The Only-begotten of the Father, when, assuming our nature, He came to obey, by the very fact of His coming to *obey*, came to *suffer*.

For how could His obedience be known, unless it were proved ? how proved, unless He were tempted ? how could the sinless One be tempted, except by a weight of affliction which, designed by the evil one

to crush Him at every step, proclaimed more fully the perfection of His obedience and the sinlessness of His character ?

One difficulty surmounted, another was permitted to occur : sorrow succeeded to sorrow ; suffering—physical, mental, moral, spiritual — accumulated upon our Blessed Lord and Master Jesus Christ, until, through the intensity of suffering, human nature could endure no more, and it was finished ; on the cross it was finished : the obedience of the Lord Jesus Christ ; the vindication of the law ; the possibility of pardon to man ; the reopening of heaven to our race,—our salvation.

We are to contemplate the Incarnate Son of God not only in the likeness of men, but in the form of a servant ; not only growing up in obscurity, but as despised and rejected of men ; supernaturally tempted, supernaturally agonised ; His back ploughed with the scourge ; His temples crowned with thorns ; His body nailed to the cross ; His dying ears tormented with derision and blasphemy : and as we think of Him, humbled for our exaltation, disgraced for our honour, suffering for our pardon, crucified for our salvation, we are taught to exclaim, “ My Lord and my God ;” and they that have ears to hear are prepared to hear the commandment of the Lord God Almighty, “ Thou shalt have none other gods but Me.”

Here, as everywhere, nature is to be the handmaid of grace. Let us read, mark, learn, and in-

wardly digest the Scriptures of Truth, that we may clearly perceive that "herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the Propitiation for our sins;" but, believing that the blessing we desire is not an acquirement, but a grace, while meditating, let us pray; and, by the mercy of God, the result will appear in a godliness exempt alike from the weakness of superstition and the reveries of fanaticism, in which are always found the strongest holds of self-deceit.



*OUR LORD'S DESERTION BY HIS
DISCIPLES.*

A SERMON,

PREACHED IN

THE CHURCH OF ST. MARY-THE-VIRGIN,
OXFORD,

ON FRIDAY, MARCH 6, 1857.

BY

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A SERMON,

&c.

JOHN xvi. 31, 32.

“Jesus answered them, Do ye now believe? Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave Me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me.”

No man could endure to be always “left alone.” We were not created to live in loneliness, hearing only the footfall of our own steps upon a desert earth, speaking idly to the echoing air, thinking, living, sorrowing only for self. There are mental and moral powers in us which demand human companionship. Wasted endowments would they be in a state of absolute isolation: “The Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone.” The creature had been organized for fellowship of mind, of heart, and voice, with other beings like himself; and so the Almighty Father proceeded to meet and satisfy the necessities of His own appointment. Man was not “left alone.” Even in the sustaining consciousness of the Divine Presence ever with him,

he needed the creature's voice and smile ; he must receive and return a human ministry of counsel and care,—the look of sympathy and the hand of love.

And man cannot contradict or violate this law without suffering himself, or entailing upon his victim, a miserable deterioration. Loss of reason comes, if he does so ; the solitary become gradually sullen, stupid, idiotic. And no religion—pure, undefiled, joyous religion—can there be in ascetic isolation. Spiritual life pines in loneliness and mere passive contemplations, languishing like a blanchèd flower in a shuttered chamber, where heaven's breeze and beam may never come ; faltering, and then dying out, as the lamp does in the damp vault of death. For vigorous health and growth, let it have contact with the bracing duties and trials which, by each day's providence, chequer our earthly path. A miserable selfishness, a narrow mind, a dead faith, a peevish and morbid temper—these are the weeds which grow rankly under the shadow of the cloistered wall, or in the solitude of the hermit's cell. “Ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world,”—such is the rule of the Christian's spirit. “I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil,”—such is our Master's will as to our Christian probation and discipline.

The human soul, then, in its first and in its best estate,—the birth estate of nature and the new estate

of grace,—must not abide in solitude, cannot bear to be “left alone.”

And never is solitude more burdensome than when we are passing through any one of life's chiefest agonies. Earnest, affectionate minds shrink then from the thought of being “alone.” It may be that they are not cowardly, but rather self-reliant. They would scorn to ask your aid, for they can suffer unhelped, but not unloved; they abhor to travail, or mourn, or die “alone.”

Now in the complex nature of the Man of Sorrows there was a real human soul,—a soul in itself, and by virtue of its contact and connection with the divine nature of the Mediator, perfectly holy, and yet endowed with all the faculties and affections which the creature has for whom He died,—all, in their fullest complement; all, in their finest susceptibilities. And thus the human soul of the Incarnate Son of God was fitted for tender and trustful association with beings like itself; desiring, selecting, enjoying the sympathy and ministry of attached friends; liable to increase of suffering or joy from the circumstances which gathered round His earthly path, and from the character and conduct of those on whom He leaned for friendship. For however it may seem to us a mystery passing comprehension, yet must we contemplate the Redeemer as exposed to the ebb and flow of human feeling from the thousand sinless causes which make our mortal joy to fluctuate; that the Divine nature, though always so

active in Him as to carry an atoning might and merit into all He suffered, did not raise His humanity above the infirmities of man's body and mind. There was but one thing in us from which His humanity was exempt,—there was no sin. "Tempted" was He, just "as we are," and the agony of that intense recoil of a perfectly holy soul from the whispers of the evil spirit, who at times directly and audibly, and always secretly and through the ministry of enemies and friends, plied his most subtle arts to stain the purity of the Holy One of God, He did taste in all its intenseness. But the sorrow of one who finds his treacherous heart responding to such suggestions, and is made sadly conscious that lustings which he thought had been long ago dormant and dead, are being stirred again, as his eye, or ear, note the object, or the creatures, towards which they used to burn; stirred like the buried gas in the coal-seam of the mine, and ready to take fire and explode with deadly fury when the torch of the tempter, the burning brands he casts about, shall touch them;—the sorrow of remorse, or penitence, or inner conflict with sin, to this He was absolutely and always a stranger.

In all other respects He was tried and tempted just as we are. How this could be it is not for us to explain—enough for us to state, scripturally, what His human nature was, and to find our solace in the sympathy and intercession of a "merciful High Priest who can be touched with the feeling of our infir

mities," in consequence of their resemblance to what were once His own.

It was, then, in the nature of the soul of the Redeemer to shrink from the thought of loneliness in the foreseen crisis of agony. In the light of His divine prescience, the scenes of that night of "exceeding sorrowfulness" were already known. The trial was in anticipation. And who is not conscious that when the heart foresees its coming distress, the anguish in the imagination of it is more appalling than the reality? A sensitive nature will quail before an untried, unfathomed woe, and yet be brave and calm under its full, but fathomed, bitterness. It is mercy, indeed, that we cannot read the future, and forecast the loneliness which is before us. But He saw clearly through all the stages of the path of passion which lay between the baptism in water and the baptism in blood, between the Jordan where He began "to fulfil all righteousness," and the hill on which the vicarious obedience was finished. And by this knowledge of His human soul—knowledge through the mysterious but perpetual union between the manhood and the Godhead, knowledge which comprehended not only the future of His own sorrow and death, but all the plots and activities of Satan's malice, and the treacheries of the traitor, and the desertion of the disciples—came much of that inner burden which was always pressing sore upon the "Man acquainted with grief." And so the Redeemer's pure and sensitive nature

would yearn for companionship in its extremity of woe, and yet could foresee that this would be denied when most needed. How distinctly does One with a power of love like ours speak in the plaintive words before you: "Ye shall leave Me alone." We should expect such words from One who chose the warm-hearted Peter and the affectionate John to be in the innermost circle of disciples, who found a shelter and a solace in the simple tenderness of the house at Bethany, and a pleasure in that costly offering which Mary made, so fragrant of sympathy, so eloquent of a vision of the future, which none else could gather from His allusions to it: words such as these we should expect to hear from One who could not bear to pray without the presence of the disciples, and when all human aid failed Him, desired the comfort of an angel's ministry. "Ye shall leave Me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me."

The words are brief, but pregnant; they tell us of a fear, a struggle, the sight of a coming loneliness which oppresses,—“I shall be alone;” and of a hope and faith that there would be a consolation in that loneliness, sufficient and inexhaustible. “Not alone, because the Father is with Me.” Desertion by the Father there will not, cannot be: forgotten, forsaken by you the Man of Sorrows will be, but by the Father never. My solitariness will be balanced, compensated, by such communion. Fellowship with Him is light, peace, and strength always; and to-

wards His beloved Son, His suffering Priest, withdrawal or suspension of that fellowship must be impossible. And the fear and hope in these words were realized: the tender feelings of the Lord were wounded by desertions; He was "left alone" by man, but the consciousness of union with the Father was complete and indestructible. Perhaps it was dimmed in the weakness and pain of the last struggle upon the cross, when He could make full estimate of the wage of sins which He bore, but never committed,—sins on which the Father's just and infinite rigour frowned, and on which was then discharged the tremendous tempest of His fierce anger. But even at the moment of the thrilling, awful cry, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" the Father was with Him—He was not "alone;" and so there were two words of faith to one of sorrow. "Forsaken," even so; but note the filial trust, retaining still the consciousness of fellowship,—"*My God, My God.*"

Now it is to the loneliness anticipated in these words that I am to lead your meditations; and most earnestly would we pray that in this our holy duty we may not be "left alone," but that the Father may be with us, for the Redeemer's sake.

Let us consider—

I. The history of the desertion anticipated in the words; and, II. the loneliness, but consolation, of our Lord, when that desertion came to pass. And while thus fixing our thoughts in succession upon the

deserting disciples and the deserted Lord, it shall be our object to view the subject in reference to ourselves; that is, to shew how we are ever in peril of falling away, as the timid disciples did in the hour of temptation, and how, in seasons when we must be "alone," it may be our strength to be comforted with the comfort with which the deserted Saviour was comforted by God.

I. The desertion of the Redeemer by the eleven:—"Ye shall leave Me alone." These words were probably spoken in the supper-chamber, between the hymn that was sung there and the departure afterwards to the garden; and then, perhaps, at a later hour, the hint here given was explained more distinctly, as we find in St. Matthew, when the Lord quoted the words of Zechariah. The warning before us was called forth by the remark of the disciples,—“Lo now speakest Thou plainly, and speakest no proverb; now we are sure that Thou knowest all things, and needest not that any should ask Thee. By this we believe that Thou comest forth from God.”

The work of Christ with the disciples was preparatory. It has been well said that “the aim and object of the prophetic office of Jesus was to prepare them for the fruits of His death, and the reception of the Spirit of Truth, who would guide them into a knowledge of its character and result, by grounding in them a firm belief in His Person. They must be established in the conviction

that He came forth from God, that He was the promised Christ, the everlasting Son of the Father. The resurrection and ascension past, and the Day of Pentecost fully come, they would understand *why* God gave His beloved Son, the atoning character and virtue of His death, and "all other benefits of His Passion." But they must have faith in His Person beforehand, in the Divine nature which carried its weight into every act and agony of His vicarious sorrow and suffering.

The work, I say, of the great Teacher with the disciples was a preparatory work, that the confession of Peter should be the conviction of all,—“Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” To this conviction they were gradually led by the testimonies from heaven, and the mighty works which were wrought before their eyes, as the deaf listened to the praises of the dumb, and the blind witnessed how women received their dead, raised to life again by the power of His word; by the holiness of His character and the spirituality of His doctrine, which found a response in their newly-awakened religious consciousness,—and the replies He made to the unuttered thoughts of men. They, too, had found how He knew their converse and competition with each other on questions of greatness in the expected kingdom,—spoken, however, so secretly by the way, that His ear could not have heard their uttered selfishness; aye, they had felt how His eye could search and make manifest

the deepest secrets of their bosoms. And the conviction has now gained a fresh vividness,—“Now we know that Thou knowest all things.” We have no occasion now to ask Thee further questions; Thou hast spoken without parable and plainly of Thyself, and of Thy relationship with the Father, and of the devotion of our hearts towards Thee. All within us lies beneath Thy searching eye; and so we do indeed “believe that Thou camest forth from God,” that Thou art verily the Christ, the Son of the living God. And they glory in this conviction, as if no further faith was needed. They knew the mystery of their Master’s nature, and yet they did not understand what He would be to them in future, or their life in Him, as Mediator. And without this knowledge, which the Comforter would afterwards impart, and their own faith realize, the hour of peril would find them unstable and weak, notwithstanding their guilelessness and loving sincerity. Hence the warning,—“Ye do now believe:” I recognise your affectionate devotion, I see your faith in My Person, but I warn you of a desertion near at hand; a desertion which your simple hearts would now avouch to be impossible; which will strengthen your faith in Me, as it teaches My foreknowledge and your weakness, and shews you that a deeper insight into the mystery of My Person, and an individual realization of the virtue of My passion and death, are necessary before there is a power to confess Me before men, and become in

yourselves, and by your ministry, My witnesses to the world; a desertion which will be the cause of that loneliness before which My soul is exceeding sorrowful. "Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave Me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me."

Upon this warning followed rapidly the betrayal, the treacherous kiss, the arrest, and the deliverance to the band of soldiers, in all apparent weakness, of the Person in whom they had confessed their faith; and *then*, St. Matthew tells us, *then* "all His disciples forsook Him, and fled."

It is impossible to gain an idea of the conflict of feelings which hurried each of the eleven into this sad cowardice. We must know more of the temperament of each apostle before we could attempt an analysis. And the individuality of each is not told us in the inspired narrative. We are assured of their guileless, simple, loving sincerity; but their natural characters are not portrayed to us; and with two exceptions, there are but slight materials upon which to make inferences. Between Peter and John there was evidently no ordinary intimacy,—a union close and confidential. Their early association and their common craft; their common readiness to forsake all for Christ's sake, and to cast in their lot with His poverty; their common vision of His glory upon the mount, and their common share in the scene of humiliation in the

garden ; these knit them together in a brotherhood and sympathy strong and peculiar. There was a diversity of temperament in these two disciples ; and one can hardly imagine how the impetuous and the gentle, the forward and the retiring, the self-confident and strong-willed and the amiable and confiding, could have formed the friendship which we trace throughout. No doubt there was a certain congeniality of warm-heartedness, of capability for the most devoted, unselfish affection, which bound the two together before the desertion, and afterwards. And these two brothers in discipleship and feeling seemed to have recovered first from the sudden panic. If John be indeed the young man of whom Mark speaks as having left his upper garment when arrested as a follower of Jesus, he soon repented and returned ; and it was he who quickly met with Peter again, and gained admission for him into the palace,—that scene of temptation, denial, and disgrace. I cannot think that the mere fear of man, that a mean cowardice, lay at the root of the panic, at least in these two united and devoted brethren. Perils enough had been already faced for their gracious Master's sake. They had witnessed the violence of the mob in Nazareth ; they had in recollection the martyrdom of John ; they had heard of Herod's wish to seize and kill the Lord ; and in many an act, and look, and word of malice, they had read how the priests and rulers thirsted for His blood ; but there had been no show of fear, no hesi-

tation in their devotedness, no thought of declension, much less of desertion. Did, then, a sudden disappointment, a sudden shaking of their faith in the Person of the Lord, hurry them away with the rest when "all forsook Him, and fled?" "We believe that Thou camest forth from God:" but could it be that He should be arrested, and handled by His enemies, in so strange a weakness? Would there be no interference of the Father on His behalf? Could He not release Himself by some grand display of Divine might? Would He not have done so if their conviction was right that He was Israel's King and Redeemer, the Christ of God? When one's hopes are suddenly dashed to the ground, and disappointment threatens the instant death of all our ardent expectations, who has not felt a bewilderment of the senses, or a fear of man and of the issue of events, which has made one shake like an aspen leaf, and be the ready prey of any evil impression?

"Ye do now believe:" their faith was genuine as regards its object—His Person,—but they saw no further. His voluntary humiliation, as Mediator, for man's redemption they did not comprehend; their eyes were not yet opened to the blessed fact that He was the appointed Sin-bearer for His people, that for this reason it "behoved Him to suffer." The great truth had yet to be learned, and all its blessed effects upon their faith, constancy, and love had yet to be realized, that He must "give His

life a ransom for many." They adored Him, loved Him, in the conviction of His majesty, in the enjoyment of His most winning love; but nothing can "cast out fear," and place us beyond all peril of declension, but that spiritual union with the Lord, that oneness with Him for ever, which only comes through faith in His precious blood, and with the consciousness of forgiveness and peace through His death and passion; nothing but the fellowship which the Holy Ghost begins, and perfects, between the contrite believer and His atoning Lord. Had they understood the true nature of His work,—had they tasted of its blessed effects upon their hopes and character,—had their faith received Him as more than a Divine Master, even as a Saviour,—then these two friends, and all the brethren, would have shewn in the garden, I must think, the courage and independence of all earthly circumstances which marked them after the ascension. But in lack of this spiritual insight, there came in, with the sudden disappointment, the rush of natural feeling; all the weaknesses of natural character; the surprise and terror of doubt; the fear of personal suffering and peril; and they left Him "alone;" "they all forsook Him, and fled." But let us turn this sad history, beloved brethren, towards ourselves.


Desertion, apostasy from Christ, i. e. from His pure truth, is no strange thing in our own day. In this time, as in all times, there have been many who have made shipwreck of their faith on one

rock or the other which bounds on either side the "narrow way;" either on the rock of sceptical doubt, or the rock of superstitious credulity; men, too, of whom better things were expected by those who once knew their companionship in the visible kingdom of Christ. But we have been forewarned from the first that in the "last days" such things must be: I doubt not that our lines are fallen in these prophetic times. It is a day of secret declension, alas! of open apostasy. Men are blown from the safe anchorage by the blasts of vain doctrine, because the "anchor of the soul" had not entered "within the veil, whither Jesus the Forerunner is for us entered;" or they have gradually drifted from its safe waters by a superficial and shallow personal religion, by a faith cold and workless, which has received the truth, but not in the love of it; a faith which, like that of the apostles, has accepted the mystery of the Lord's Person, but gone no further towards the new life and comfort which flood in upon the reliant heart when there is a perception and appropriation of His merits and sacrifice, and of the actions, virtue, and grace of His unique Priesthood.

It is a day of shams and shadows, rather than of Christian life indeed. The Gospel has been preached clearly and attractively during the last half-century. The fathers of that revival entered into its power. But divine grace is not an hereditary blessing; its transmission is not "by the will of the flesh, nor by

the will of man, but of God." There may be religious activity without Christian love,—an emotional love for the doctrines or symbols of the faith, while there is a fatal absence of its vital influence. And this, I fear, is the history of the religious feeling of the age. And in such a state of things Satan will spread hopefully his snares, and anti-Christ put forth his old and most cunning arts. And when Christian truth is not transformed into a motive or spring of action, and there is no light of divine teaching, and so no inspiration of a divine life in the soul, what security can you have against their seductions? And if the heart is in a state of secret apostasy from God, the profession may be so any day. We are then the ready prey of any specious error which may come in upon the Church, under the show of advanced scholarship, or the light of philosophy. The heart will long for any suggestions of unbelief which may relieve it from the bondage of a spiritual religion which it naturally abhors, and from that unworldly, self-denying, temper which always accompanies, and characterizes, thorough discipleship with Christ. And thus the true cause why many fall away, who have hitherto walked with Him, lies in the perilous state of their own spirit before God.

And what security do you hold against desertion from the Lord, while your religious stability depends upon the mere impulses of a transient and **deceptive** emotion. Piety, which is nothing more



than the better workings of a sentimental mind, will not preserve you in the season of temptation, or strengthen you for the sacrifices and services of Christian life. It will melt away, like snow-flakes under sunbeams, before "the fiery trial" which will be sent to test every man's inner work. There was much of the impulses of natural feeling in the devotedness of Peter and John, and but little of a clear and safe faith in Christ, when they joined in the sad flight from the garden ; but when the Day of Pentecost was bygone, and their eyes were opened to see Him, and their hearts won to love Him in a new character, then the boldness of the weak fugitives astonished the Jewish magistrates, as they "took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus."

Fear for your future, brethren, fear for your souls, if yours be the religion of emotional sentiment. It is most important to distinguish carefully between keen impression and practical conviction,—between the enthusiasm of high-wrought feeling and genuine conversion,—as between the blush of fever and the bloom of health. But how many fall away because of this distinction. They have seasons of deep religious emotion, and these continue with the stimulants that called them up. They mourn for sin ; they see the beauty of the Gospel ; they hear it with joy ; and then, like Herod under John's preaching, do many things towards a new and higher life. But anon there is no stability, no even bias of the

soul towards "affections set on things above," no faith that overcomes the world, no constancy of desire for communion with God. They feel and then forget, and so at last forget to feel. The coldness of the relapse is proportionate to the past fever of their enthusiasm; the higher the waters have risen, the lower their after ebb. If conviction was conversion, and godliness an occasional sentiment, then might we spare our warning voice. But the counterfeit must be separated from the real, for he who allows the cheat destroys the soul. Let the mountain be covered with snow all along the fierce winter, yet, when spring unclouds the sun, the white mantle shall melt away in gushing streams; so the ice and cold of the heart's winter pass away in the flow of penitential tears, under the "healing wings of the Sun of Righteousness." But if by an unseasonable frost the melting glacier gathers a second hardness, and congeals again in the spring night, it does but enlarge its icy and impenetrable mass. The religious emotions of an unchanged heart leave it at last more truly a heart of stone than ever. The danger of relapse under fever is more hopeless than the first attack. If your religion be only one of feeling, it will yet awhile reduce you to a state of mind past all feeling. If it be the excitement of natural susceptibilities of impression, instead of the movements of a converted heart; if there be in it no faith that "lives by the faith of the Son of God;" if it be wrought in you by any earthly

force, and not by the “godly motions” of the Spirit of grace, having only the strength of the natural man, and not of the new creation in Christ Jesus; a religion which brought into your souls no bitter convictions of sin’s malignity, no burden of godly sorrow pressing sore upon your conscience, no longing for release from the “grievous remembrance,” no repentance unto salvation, no anxious looking for the Divine mercy in Christ, no simple resting upon the Lord as your righteousness and peace, no desire after holiness, no unreserved and ardent devotedness to Him who “loved you and gave Himself for you,”—however it may keep you in a pious glow, and cheat you into the idea that you are a Christian indeed, giving you for the present moment a treacherous calm of mind, and a zest for the means of grace, or for certain religious exercises and seasons,—shortly it will decay and die out like a rootless flower; shortly, notwithstanding its promise of raising you heavenward, it will sink earthward again with the vanishing light of a falling star; shortly it shall give mournful illustration of the wide distinction between the pulse and the spasm of a galvanised corpse, and the throb and energy of a living man,—between the religion which lives on feeling, and that which lives in God. You will be found amongst those who forsake and flee. The unclean spirit is cast out of the man, but, behold, he returns with seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and, finding the house swept and garnished,

he enters in and dwells there, and the last state of that man is worse than the first.

Have you religious impressions? nurse them anxiously, but pass beyond into a deeper earnestness. Fear lest the "morning cloud and the early dew," as they pass away with the advancing dawn, foreshadow the death of your desires after a higher life; fear lest you should be a castaway when you have seen, perhaps "tasted of the heavenly gift." Forsake your Lord! What, then, if in the awful hour of your death-scene He forsake you? Rather go onwards towards Him in a more devoted allegiance. Pray for a conviction of your need of Him; add to your conviction trust; add to your trust love. There are that forsake and flee: "will ye also go away?" Nay, conviction will say, I dare not; trust will reply, I would not; and love will affirm the decision,—I cannot.

But to turn from the disciples to the deserted Lord; "Ye shall leave Me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me."

"Ye shall leave Me alone." These pathetic words held in them the past history of the human soul of the Redeemer no less than the consciousness of a future trial. There was a purity, a holiness there, which always isolated Him,—always raised Him beyond the fellowship of the creature's sympathy, raised Him to a solitariness on which no earthly companionship had power to intrude.

Every human spirit keeps for itself a solitude

over which no strange eye can pass. Chambers are there, in every temple of a soul, of thought and deepest feeling, of love, of sorrow and joy, which are shuttered up against all glances;—homes of hidden secrets which we could not open to the most prized friendship;—secrets, which if shaped into speech, could find no response in another human spirit; in which we must be left “alone,” while yet we are not alone, because, even in these, the Father is with us. Each man has his distinct individuality. Minds the most kindred in cast of thought, hearts the most knit in common sensibilities, do not touch on all points, but find and feel a severance on many. There is much in each of us which must remain unshared,—which is absolutely personal, incommunicable. There are depths of a distinct consciousness within us into which others have never looked, though a life of confidence has been spent with us.

But there are guesses to be made as to the aspects and movements of the inner world. Self may be suggestive of what is not self. But Christ, as man, was mentally more “alone” than any being who ever knew the conflicts and thoughts of a human soul. What fallen creature could form even a faint conception of the character and purity, of the high meditations of the Son of God. What views of nature, of law, of providence, of grace, of souls, must have lain open before Him to whom the Spirit was given without measure. What

searchings into the deep things of God by Him who said, "As the Father knoweth Me, even so know I the Father." What searchings into the deep things of man by Him who "needed not that any should tell Him, for He knew what was in man." His hints, His plainest words, fell upon the ears of the most intimate as parables. Into the secrecy of His mysterious nature no disciples could intrude; "They left Him alone," and yet in that solitariness the "Father was with Him."

And the daily anguish of His spirit was unshared. The burden upon the heart which took our griefs, and carried our sorrows, who could touch or tell? The pure know best the bitterness of temptation; but what *their* bitterness to that of the intense recoil of His holy mind from the suggestions of the tempter,—recoil the more intense because the prince of this world found nothing in Him. Tears over Jerusalem, tears before the vault of the Lazarus He loved, tears with blood-drops in the garden,—there is no fathoming the well of sorrow from which they gushed. And that struggle which found utterance beneath the olive-trees,—struggle between a shrinking nature and a submissive will,—was it not life-long? All along the wrath-cup was upon His lips, and the agonizing cries of the garden and the cross only told that He was wringing out the dregs. It must have been that "they left Him alone;" in a loneliness of thought, of anguish, of

conflict, and yet of peace, in which the "Father was with Him :—" "He looked for some to have pity and found none, neither was there any to help Him."

2. There was the loneliness of choice. He was severed from all human ministries as Mediator. In the works of the God-man there could be no room for such ; there could be no associate. He invited the love of the disciples, and found joy in companionship with them, but He never asked their moral aid ; He never either commanded, or entreated, their prayers. Never did He take them into a level of position with Himself, and bid them to common supplications to "their Father and His Father, to their God and His God." They were witnesses, learners, servants, but "fellow-workers" with Him never. In the progress and completion of the great plan He was the sole mover : they left Him alone, —the Father only was with Him. "He trode the wine-press *alone*, and of the people there was none with Him." The righteousness which is our peace with God He wrought out "alone ;" the burden of our guilt He took "alone ;" the sacrifice which is our redemption He made "alone ;" the death which is our life He tasted "alone ;" the victory which is our triumph He won "alone." Who shall dare to intrude upon the mediatorial solitariness of Christ ? Venture not to offer associate to that High Priest who was left "alone." Venture not to link priest, or angel, or saint with that intercession which He made, which He ever lives to make "alone ;" ven-

ture not to intrude merit, or tears, or efforts, or prayers into that perfect righteousness for our justification which He wrought out "alone." The sinner can only receive as a gift what He won when He travailed "alone." Say with Hooker, "Our salvation is by Christ alone: howbeit not so by Him alone, as if in our vocation the hearing of the Gospel; to our justification faith; to our sanctification the fruits of the Spirit; to our entrance into rest perseverance in faith, and hope, and holiness were not necessary."

3. But He speaks mournfully here of the loneliness in which human frailty would leave Him. Companionship would be sustaining, though it could bring no more than the look and tear of sympathy. It would save from that feeling of desolateness which flesh and blood cannot endure; it would meet the cravings of anguish for a ministry of affection, which can respond to cries and throes which it cannot help. But it was denied Him. "Tarry ye here and watch with Me," was the charge of the confiding Lord: "And He cometh unto Peter, and findeth them asleep;" and then, "Could ye not watch with Me one hour?" was the remonstrance of a sensitive spirit, pierced by the apathy of those He loved. And if so, was ever sorrow of disappointment like unto His sorrow when "*they all* forsook Him, and fled."

But the majesty of self-reliance solaces in the expectation of desertion. There can be indepen-

dance of man when there is dependance on God. "I am not alone, because the Father is with Me." Cherith may fail the prophet, but God can feed him; the widow's oil may fail, but Israel's God can multiply the supply. Human hearts may falter, but there is One who says, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love." When there is least of man, then shall there be most of God. It had been always so; it shall be so with Him: "He shall drink of the brook in the way, therefore shall He lift up His heart;" and thus the deserted Redeemer did find His stay and comfort in the Father.

Brethren, we shall have *our* hours of loneliness, hours in which we shall mourn because we are left "alone." All the Lord's human sorrows were typical of ours, and He left us an example in them that we may follow His steps. Days will come when we shall find that we have garnered our affections in others in vain; days when all our earthly hopes will suffer a rude bankruptcy, when clouds will gather upon our horizon, and in which, like children in a thunder-storm, we would fain cling round our "lovers and friends," though we know that there is no human shelter from the bursting tempest anywhere. Then, too, we shall find that bitter is the pang in store for him that trusteth in man. "So long as thou doest well unto thyself, men will speak good of thee;" but when the chill shadow falls round about our dwelling, and the candle of earthly blessing no longer lights it up, then look

we for a falling away, "like water which runneth apace." And where will be *our* reliance, where *our* solace, *then*?

Or we must visit the solitariness of the sick room; there we shall be left "alone:" affection, with all its self-denial, cannot keep unbroken vigils. Its eye must sleep, but not ours: we shall hear the bell sound out (how wearily!) the dragging hours: the mind must commune with itself. The past, the future, will flit before it; the thoughts will be busy for sorrow or joy, for hope or fear, before the uncertainty which hangs over the issue; and it will be solitariness indeed if we have then to enquire, "Where is God my Maker, who giveth songs in the night?"

Or it shall come to pass that we sit in the desolate chamber, and wear the dress of mourning. We are left "alone." The golden cord is broken, the knit hearts are riven asunder, the accustomed chair is vacant, the house is silent: there is only one aching heart there to agonize under an unshared burden. A blank is everywhere: life's remaining days must be spent in the memory of what has passed away for ever; we must take our weary way "alone." There may be some to "weep with those who weep," but friendship cannot fill up the aching void of bereaved affection.

Lastly, in the extremity of death we must be left, as the Redeemer was, "alone." Lover and friend will conduct us down to the edge of the dark

valley, to the touch of the cold waters ; but they must leave us there ; we must pass on into the mysterious gloom "alone." This instant our souls shall listen to, and drink in, the last words of love and prayer ; the next they are away,—where, we cannot tell. Ah ! we may live in the crowds of life, and in the noisy bustle forget the solitary moment which is fast coming upon us ; but we must leave this crowd, we must die "alone." The friend may wipe the tear, and moisten the stiff, icy lip, but he cannot tell us what it is to die, he cannot counsel from experience.

Now, in such dark moments, what provision have you made for the bitter solitude ? what hope have you for the compensating presence of the Father ? Would it not be peace, indeed, to feel in that bankruptcy of all your cherished hopes that there is One, virgin-born, tempted, deserted, "touched with the feelings" of our infirmities,—for *you* ? would it not be peace, indeed, to have for anthem, in that sick chamber, "My flesh and my heart faileth ; but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever ;" and for comfort, the promise, "I will be with thee in trouble ?"

Would it not be peace, indeed, when in the dress of mourning, to think that time, like an "arrowy river," is hastening into eternity, and that eternity is unbroken fellowship for them that "sleep in Jesus ?" Above all, when lover and friend fade out of view, and there open before you the awful

sights and scenes of the spiritual world, and the judgment upon *character* must immediately begin, and its issue launch your spirit into the sweet societies of "the spirits of just men made perfect," or cast it down into the first fires of the endless woe,—would it not be peace, indeed, to know that, clad in the white robe which has been washed in the blood of the Lamb, and holy in His image, your freed spirit is bound for that paradise where there is solitariness for none, because all there are "ever with the Lord?"

Then rest on Him who was left in loneliness that you might never be deserted: then seek the relationship of a child, that you may have a filial confidence in the presence of your Almighty Father. In Christ this grace may be surely yours; and then that solace which He felt in loneliness shall descend,—like the precious ointment which fell on the skirts of Aaron's clothing,—from your atoning and sympathizing Priest on you, the member of His spiritual body.

But may be you have fears in the consciousness of sad desertions, base denials: you have forsaken Him and fled, when you should have stood and fought. Yet He has not left *you* "alone." Remember the fallen Peter, and follow to the hall of shame and contempt; watch there for the grace of that countenance which can look you into tears,—tears, like "dew-drops from the womb of the morning" of a new life. Remember John; follow to

the cross, and the call to fellowship with the spiritual family of the Lord may yet fall upon your stricken soul. Remember the Eleven: "All ye shall be offended because of Me this night; but after I am risen I will go before you into Galilee." There is a rallying point for guilty fugitives, a meeting-place for restoration. It is before the "throne of grace:" hasten there; lest, when He appears for benediction, you, like Thomas, should be absent: or, when He appears for judgment, you, like Judas, should be a castaway.

ALIENATION FROM GOD.

A SERMON,

PREACHED IN

THE CHURCH OF ST. MARY-THE-VIRGIN,

OXFORD,

ON WEDNESDAY, MARCH 11, 1857.

BY

RICHARD CHENEVIX TRENCH, D.D.,

DEAN OF WESTMINSTER.

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M DCCC LVII.



A SERMON,

&c.

EPHESIANS iv. 18.

“ Alienated from the life of God.”

MY brethren, if we at all believe that creation is the work of God ; that highest wisdom, and highest power, and highest goodness, these, and not random chance, presided over its birth ; we must then also, and as a necessary consequence, believe that to every creature of God’s hand a certain sphere of action was at the first assigned, in which moving, all should be well with it, for it would be fulfilling the ends of its creation ; while, if it should forsake this, or be forcibly removed from it, all would then be harsh, discordant, adapting itself ill, or adapting itself not at all, to its well-being ;—which indeed could not be otherwise, seeing that it would thus traverse and go counter to the purpose with which it was created.

This is evidently true in that lower and natural world of animals which is beneath us. There are certain regions in which their several races can ex-

ist and multiply—in which the conditions of existence are favourable to them—in which they find the food convenient for them—in which there is a work to be done, which their structure and habits specially adapt them to fulfil—in which, according to the measure of well-being whereof they are capable, and making allowance for that “bondage of corruption” under which they lie, as well as we, it is well with them; while all this would cease if they were transplanted elsewhere, if they were placed under other skies and in other lands: for instance, if the camel among the snows of Lapland, or the reindeer in the burning sands of Arabia: they would be useless, they would be miserable,—that is, so far as that which has no reflective act is capable of misery; they would pine, and shortly perish from off the face of the earth.

Now this, which in a lower sense is true of the lower creation, is true in a far higher sense of man, the crown of things, the first-fruits of God’s creatures, the sixth day’s work of His hands, the image of the Son, as the Son is the Image of the Father. He, too, has a sphere assigned him, in which he shall live, and move, and have his being; there is a divine intention in regard of him, which if he fulfil, he falls in everywhere with the pre-established harmonies of God’s moral universe; which if, on the other hand, he refuses to recognise, he finds himself in every point of his circumference at variance, in opposition, in contradiction to it. Now

the greater circle which includes and comprehends his lesser circle is God. The sphere for which *he* was created was the sphere of duty,—of recognition of a law, and obedience to it ; he was created to confess a higher power above him, to know God, and to love Him, and in this knowledge and in this love to find the end of his creation, his glory, and his joy.

So far he is under the same conditions as every other creature which occupies the same earth with him ; yet it needs not to say, for it has been already implied, and is obvious to every one, that sublime, and at the same time very awful, prerogatives difference and distinguish him from them all. He is the only one who by an act of his own will may set his seal to this purpose wherewith God has created him, and declare that it is good ; even as he is the only one who can contradict this intention, can fight against it, and, as far as he is personally concerned, can defeat it. Being the only creature capable of knowing God, so is he the only one with the fearful capacity of refusing to know Him ; in that he, and he only, can love God, so he only can hate. The heights to which he can ascend measure also the depths to which he can fall. The saint and angel which are latent in him involve also the beast and devil, which must be latent in him as well. His possible glory is the measure of his possible shame. This is a necessary, an inevitable result. The same liberty of will which renders the

one conceivable, renders also the other. Man's potential blessedness involves and draws after it a potential misery equal to it.

It is, then, the fearful prerogative of man, one which he shares with angels, that he *can* depart from God. And this which he can do, he has done. Whole nations, yea, all the nations of the earth but one, and that one was evermore seeking to depart, needing continually to be brought back, and by sharpest chastenings, to Him,—all nations have once already left God, have walked in their own ways, have little by little stripped themselves of the knowledge of Him, till in the end they had quite exchanged His truth for lies. Once in the history of our race, and on the largest scale, such a world-wide apostacy found place. And it lay then, as it must ever lie, involved in the grandeur of man's original destination, that this defeat of the purposes for which he was created, this abdication of his high privileges, should bring misery with it. It did so notoriously then, in that old heathen world of which I speak. Men shewed plainly then, that being without God in the world, they were also without hope. What voices of despair, what cries of anguish reach us from that heathen world, if we will but listen for them. In its laughter there is heaviness, while the sighs which follow its mirth are as the deep-drawn sighs of some mourner who, stricken to the heart, has forgotten his anguish for an instant, but then returns to it the sadder for that

momentary oblivion, returns to it as to that which alone is his portion for ever.

But it is not only in those times of ignorance, in those times which God winked at, going, as they did, before that crowning manifestation of divine love, the incarnation of God's own Son, that men have departed from God ; but in these last days, in which God has spoken to us by His Son, brought men into relations far closer, far more intimate, far more personal, than any which the men of that old world knew, men may forsake Him ; and they do forsake, departing from Him, and saying to Him, "Depart from us ; we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways :—" "What can the Almighty do for us ?" or as one who lately closed a long life of mocking unbelief put it, and the words have for us an infinite sadness in them,—“I am not a child ; I do not want a heavenly Father.”

And the same causes which led to the one defection lead also to the other. The Church in her theology has ever taught, and the very deepest truth is involved in this teaching, that pride is the sin which is the mother of all other sins, the sin in which all other sins are included ; pride, not in its accidental, external manifestations of a haughty demeanour, or an evident contempt for others, but pride in its essence,—as a refusal on the part of the creature to lead a creature's life, to trust in its Creator, to receive of His life, to live upon His fulness ; as the determination of the creature to set

up for itself, to be the fountain of its own blessedness ; to be that which, indeed, it can never be, namely, independent and self-sufficing ; and which if it attempts to be, it will be miserable—miserable, because blindly contradicting the only possible conditions of its blessedness.

Pride, then, the sin by which angels fell, is, and must ever be, the sin which opens the door in man's heart by which all other sins enter there. That this must be so is plain ; because, while sin may be contemplated under two aspects,—as aversion from the Creator, and as conversion to the creature ; as a turning *from* God, and a turning *to* the world,—it is manifest that aversion from the Creator, which is pride in exercise, must go before conversion to the creature ; that this is only possible as a consequence of that. It is not that these are ever separable in the actual life of men. He who turns from God, the unchangeable good, does in the same act turn to the world, and seek his good in it. Still, in tracing what one of old called the *Hamartigenia*, or the generation of sin, these two may be conveniently contemplated apart ; they are so contemplated by our Lord in the parable of the Prodigal Son ; for the young man first claims the portion of goods which, as he supposes, falls to him,—this is the turning from God ; and only as a second act, distinct from the first, and separate in time from it, gathers all together and departs into a far country, which is a turning to the creature.

Indeed, according as men are tempted more to spiritual wickednesses, or to earthly desires and carnal lusts, so will be the form which their alienation from God will predominantly assume. In some, aversion from Him will be the strongest feature of it; in others, conversion to the creature. You cannot divide, but you may distinguish the two. There are the Pharaohs,—they are the fewest in number,—who say, “Who is the Lord, that we should obey Him?” and there are the invited guests, who, with a courteous apology, with an “I pray thee have me excused,” turn to their field and to their merchandise.

There are, first, some whose departure from God is not mere departure: it is active enmity against Him; it is defiance. God stands over against them as an opposing power: “God’s judgments are far above out of their sight, and therefore defy they all their enemies;” and even if those judgments find them out, they may be stricken, but they do not grieve; the bricks may be cast down, but they will build with hewn stone; and if at last they are compelled to own the finger of God, “Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?” is the only confession that can be wrung out from them; for they are fighters against God, and in a much more real sense than those nations of old, of whom we read that when God thundered and lightened from heaven, they hurled their spears and shot their arrows in impotent wrath against the sky.

And these men will sometimes be free from gross carnal sins. They will take a proud pleasure in shewing that it needs not the grace of God, and the blessed restraints of His law and His Holy Spirit, to preserve men from these,—the fact being that one sin in them, which is pride, holds other sins in suspense ; Satan is casting out Satan—or is seeming to cast him out, for we have our Saviour's word that this never can truly be.

Or the aversion from God will be sometimes rather a leaving out of Him than a fighting against Him. The man goes his own way. "God is not in all the thoughts." He works out the sum of his life, only leaving out the principal factor therein. If he succeeds, he burns incense to his own drag—"by the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom, for I am prudent;" if he fails, they are the blind destinies and chances that have fought against him, for he acknowledges no other power.

But in other men, it will not be so much the turning from the Creator, as the turning to the creature, which will strike the beholder, which will be the predominant feature of their ungodliness, the shape which their alienation from God will assume. They do not—at least so they think—war with Heaven ; they simply attach themselves to earth ; seeking their good where they can never find it—in the things which are beneath them, and not in those which are above. Instead of the *Sursum corda* of Christ and of His Church, they have

heard that *Deorsum corda*, which the world, the flesh, and the devil are always sounding in all our ears ; and hearing this, they have obeyed.

Neither let us suppose of these that they all answer the Apostle's description, as men working all uncleanness with greediness. Oh no ; they mind earthly things,—but many of them would be well content to mind heavenly things too, if only they might mind the earthly things first. God should have a place in the pantheon of their hearts, if only He would take the second, or the third, or whatever at the moment it might be convenient to assign Him. At the same time, some indeed answer his description only too well. Having forsaken Him who is the fountain of living waters, they seek presently to slake the thirst of their spirits at the muddiest pools of sensual joys ; drinking up iniquity like water, and being indeed given over to work all uncleanness with greediness, to do evil with both hands earnestly, to debase themselves even unto hell. Rolling in the mire, they are well pleased with that sorceress sin, which, like Circe, has transformed them into swine, and has given them the swine's husks, which they count far better than the children's bread, so that they would fear nothing so much as to be restored to their original shape and dignity again. And yet I know not whether these, dreadful as their state is, are not in better case, are not more likely in the end to be converted, than those who, with hearts just as really alienated from

God, just as earnestly minding earthly things, have never fallen into their frantic excesses, and perhaps, therefore, are less likely to have ever the eyes of their understanding opened, and to become convinced of their danger and their guilt.

But, my brethren, alike for these and for those, and for all who are alienated from the life of God, that is, from God who is the life,—what must be the end? What the *final* end must be, if they thus continue, we surely know: to be alienated from life is to acquaint ourselves with death. We can only dimly and uncertainly shadow out the intermediate steps. God's judgments are a great deep. Some of those who have thus departed from Him, He seems to leave to themselves. It may be, so many warnings have been already despised by them, so many checks of conscience overborne, that it would only increase their guilt, if these were multiplied further. But be this the explanation or no, it might seem as if the decree had gone forth about them, Let them alone; why should they be smitten any more? And, most dreadful judgment of all, they *are* let alone. They settle down in that far land where God is not, but of which they have said, notwithstanding, that they have a delight therein. They became prosperous, well-to-do citizens of that alien land. They are visited, so far as human eye can see, with no home-sickness, no remembrance of a Father's house which they have forsaken, of a Father's love which they have

despised. It is never given to them to sit down on the ground in that blessed despair which is as the night out of which a more blessed morn will break, and to exclaim with the prodigal, "I perish with hunger." They come into no misfortune like other folk ; and when, it may be, the profligacies of youth, forsaken, but, alas ! not repented, have been exchanged for the decent proprieties of a later age,—the forms of godliness being among the decencies which they have assumed,—all men speak well of them. And so they prosper in this world, and call the lands by their own names, and have children at their desire, and leave the rest of their substance to their babes, and they die as in a good old age, and are honourably buried ; and they are praised in this world, and tormented in hell.

But He who knows all hearts, and who sees in thee one who is recoverable yet, a jewel for His crown, although now lying in the mire, it may be that He will not relinquish His purpose of making thy heart His own, and He may spare thee that dreadfulest doom, namely, that unpunished prosperity which is sometimes the portion of reprobate men. He may follow thee whither thou hast fled : He may bring thee back from thence ; but by what means ? As He brought back Jonah of old, when he too fled from the task of his life, from the face of the Lord, seeking to hide himself from Him. He may pursue thee and overtake thee with His storms. He may bring thee back to Himself, but

not until all His waves and storms have gone over thee, till the depths have closed round about thee, so that if thou art saved at all, thou shalt, like Jonah, be saved by a miracle—the jaws of hell yielding back their prey, and thou, with no abundant entrance, but cast shivering, stripped, and naked upon the eternal shore.

Thou wilt bless God even for this ; for indeed what love is it, what faithfulness in Him, when He will not suffer us to forget our own people and our Father's house ; when He brings the soul that has forsaken Him into sore straits, into distresses, (they may be outward distresses or inward distresses, or they may be both together) ; what love is it, what faithfulness in Him, when He will not allow the sinner to be at ease in his sin, when He empties him from vessel to vessel, when He breaks his idols, disappoints his ambitions, hedges up his way with thorns, mixes gall and wormwood with his honey, or makes that honey itself to pall and to be loathsome ; when He causes his friends to forsake him, his enemies to rise up against him, the reeds on which he leant to break beneath him or to pierce him ; when He Himself meets the man as an adversary, causes him to possess the sins of his youth, makes him empty and desolate : empty, that so in his emptiness he may seek to Him who is the eternal fulness, and who only can fill any human heart ; desolate, that so he may come at length, weary and heavy laden, to lay the intolerable bur-

den of his life at the feet of Him who only can bear that burden for him, who *can* bear it and will, laying upon him in return His own light burden and easy yoke. How much better this than that unpunished prosperity of evil men, who have no sorrows in their life, nor bands in their death, for whom all things go well,—except the one thing which in the end shall be all.

Better, yet itself how sad,—as compared, at least, with the lot which might be ours,—how sad this wounding of ourselves with wounds which are only not deadly, and the scars of which, even though the wounds be healed, we may carry with us to our graves ; this being saved as brands that are snatched half burned from the fire ; this being brought back as fugitive slaves with stripes from afar, when we might have grown up as children in our Father's house. Spare yourselves all this, even this sharp discipline of pitying but punishing love ; spare yourselves this while ye may. Weave not these threads of gloom into the tissue of your life ; strike not the crown of gladness from your brows. Life anyhow must have sadness enough for a sinful man living in the midst of sinful men. Add not in this way to it so much of needless sadness besides. Believe, upon the word of every one who has tried, that it is an evil and a bitter thing to forsake the Lord our God. What need to add your own seal, the seal of your own miserable experience, to this ?

And if we would not do so, what should be our prayer? What but this, "Knit my heart unto the love of Thy holy Name?" Grant that I may never grow weary of my Father's house, of its wholesome discipline, its wise restraints, its laws, *in* keeping of which, and not merely *for* keeping of which, there is great reward. And what must be our care? Never to forget that there is in every one of us a bitter root of unbelief, a principle of apostasy from God, which, unchecked and unresisted, must inevitably lead to extremest and entirest departure from Him. Some here may, perhaps, remember in what way Augustine glossed those words of the Psalmist, "Deliver me from the evil man," and whom by this "evil man" he understood: *Libera me ab homine malo, a me ipso*; "Deliver me from the evil man, from myself"—from the pride, the sensuality, the selfishness, the unbelief, which are in me; from these lusts, which are sometimes sleeping, but are ever ready to waken again; from these evil beasts, which have been chained and put under our feet, but which it needs only a little carelessness on our part, and they will break loose once more, and turn upon us and devour us.

But if this counsel comes too late—too late to preserve us from departure from God, yet it cannot come too late, as it urges return to Him. He has devised a way whereby His banished may return home. What words, my brethren, are

these: "Thou hast destroyed thyself, but in Me is thy help." And He who spake these words has laid that help upon One that is mighty, who can lift us out of the mire and set us with princes, who can take away the stained garment of our sin, and clothe us with the pure, spotless raiment of His righteousness; who can so cast our sins out of His sight, that in the great day of inquisition they shall be sought and not found; for He who seeks shall be the same that has hidden them, who has borne, and so borne, that He has borne them away for ever. So much for the guilty, miserable past; while for the present, and the time to come, only make proof whether there be not healing powers in that word which Christ's Church preaches, in those Sacraments which she administers, in those promises whereof she is the bearer, in that grace of which she is the channel, in that wise self-discipline which she enjoins,—healing powers of restoration which shall be equal, yea, more than equal, even to the needs and hurts of your souls. Only make proof whether there be not here bands which can knit, and knit for ever, your hearts to the love of His holy Name.

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JUDAS ISCARIOT.

A SERMON,

PREACHED IN

THE CHURCH OF ST. MARY-THE-VIRGIN,
OXFORD,

ON FRIDAY, MARCH 13, 1857.

BY

GEORGE MOBERLY, D.C.L.,

HEAD MASTER OF WINCHESTER COLLEGE.

OXFORD,

AND 377, STRAND, LONDON:

JOHN HENRY AND JAMES PARKER.

M DCCC LVII.

A SERMON,

&c.

ST. JOHN xiii. 18.

“ I speak not of you all : I know whom I have chosen : but that the Scripture may be fulfilled, He that eateth bread with Me hath lifted up his heel against Me.”

THERE is not in the whole compass of the New Testament a more melancholy passage than the one which begins with these words, and extends to the thirtieth verse of the same chapter. It is the passage in which the traitor is, for the first time in the sacred narrative, brought actually out to light. The holy Lord was troubled in His spirit to speak the sad words ; but for the sake of the other apostles, and of the Church in all time, He testified beforehand that one of them was about to betray Him. Then when He had, by the dipping of the sop, and giving it to Judas Iscariot, shewn plainly both to himself, and probably to the rest of the apostles, which was the traitor, He bade him, in that tone of melancholy but stern calmness which nothing but the immediate possession of Satan could have steeled him to resist, do quickly that which he

was doing. The traitor went forth into the darkness, never again to rejoin the company with which he had been so long associated. Immediately upon his departure the troubled spirit of the Lord seems to have been soothed, and He broke forth into that unchecked strain of divine love and comfort which, extending through the next three chapters, rises to that solemn and most affecting prayer of the seventeenth chapter,—that prayer which is the very same that He is still continually offering at His Father's right hand, in the strength of which *we* pray, and hope, and are in peace.

Most melancholy, I say, is this passage of Holy Scripture; for the words sound like the words of bitter, heavy disappointment; they sound like the mourning of the kindest and most loving of pastors, fathers, friends, brothers, over the final loss of one who will not be saved; they seem to tell of hopes crushed, opportunities lost, prospects gradually darkened, and all that gloomy history of wilful ruin which sometimes goes near to break the heart of a man who has utterly failed to rescue a child, or friend, from total and irremediable loss.

Yet they are not properly words of disappointment. They are deeper and more solemn than mere words of disappointment. Consider who is the speaker;—not one who could be deceived or disappointed, who could entertain warm and eager hopes, and then find them all overthrown by a result unlooked for. No; they are the words of deep,

divine, omniscient, patient, long-forbearing love. They speak of a loss, now, indeed, total and hopeless, but not always so; long foreknown and foreseen, yet not in itself inevitable; a loss which had been gradually deepening into certainty, watched from its beginning to its end,—allowed, never forcibly cut short, and now, with accelerated speed, as the ultimate fall drew nearer, rushing, as it were, to its end.

For consider, even as far as we can trace it, the main points of the course of the fallen apostle in the previous history.

Chosen one of the twelve, out of the number of the disciples, “to be with” the Lord, to company with Him during all the time that He went in and out among the disciples on the earth, we find no indication that he was, at that time, entirely devoid of all belief. No ordinary earthly temptation, no intelligible indirect motive can be assigned why one who was totally and absolutely unbelieving should have joined the company of One who, more homeless than the foxes or the birds of the air, had not where to lay His head.

Sent, again, one of two, when the twelve were sent out two and two to preach,—taking nothing for his journey but a staff only,—no scrip, no bread, no money in his purse*,—we can hardly suppose that he was acting a deep part of utter insincerity and fraud, and that there was not mingled with the

* St. Mark vi. 8.

worldliness and weakness of his character some sort of belief in that which, with such self-denial and suffering, he preached.

Commissioned with powers not less extensive and wonderful than his brethren, he, no doubt, as well as they, had power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness, and all manner of disease^b; and no doubt, again, he exercised this power, and found, as the seventy found, that the devils were subject unto him through the name of Christ^c.

Returning, with the other apostles, to report all things, both what they had done and what they had taught, it does not appear that the Lord made any difference between his labours and those of his brethren, when, on their return, He took them, and went aside with them privately into a desert place to rest awhile.

What, then, are we to think of him thus far? Must we suppose him a mere hypocrite? a simple infidel, totally devoid of any sort of belief,—yes, and even while he was exercising superhuman powers in his Lord's name utterly unbelieving of that Lord's divine power and doctrine? Impossible! Surely, brethren, he was more like one of ourselves,—a man of indeterminate mind, capable of going right, very liable to go wrong; trembling, as it were, and hesitating on the edge of faith, yet not yielding himself, in heart and soul, to his Master's

^b St. Matt. x. 1.

^c St. Luke x. 17.

will ; believing, (not really, nor savingly, but with a kind of belief,) working, obeying, but throughout with *reserves* ; never going into broad, intentional, professed unbelief or disobedience,—perhaps thinking of himself not otherwise than of a reasonably faithful, hard-working, obedient apostle.

But ere long a case arose which probed him deep,—the great discourse which the Lord held in the sixth of St. John, respecting the eating of His Flesh, and drinking of His Blood. We find that the murmurs of the Jews at His saying that He was the Bread which came down from heaven received some countenance, and, as it were, echo, in the company of the apostles themselves ; so that the Lord broke off from the flow of His discourse to say, “ No man can come to Me, except the Father which hath sent Me draw him ; and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man, therefore, that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto Me.” And what was it, or who was it, that thus checked the holy Lord in the midst of one of His greatest and deepest discourses ? It was *Judas*. “ There are some of *you* that believe not. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and *who should betray Him*. And He said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto Me, except it were given unto him of My Father.” It was *Judas Iscariot*, and, as we should

gather from this last passage, some other disciples, not apostles, along with him, whom the great eucharistic discourse, the great doctrine of the Holy Communion, discovered in their unbelief, as with a touchstone, and whose unbelief interrupted for a few moments the onward teaching of the Lord.

Yet he did not go away, or leave the Lord's company. Some more simple-hearted, though unbelieving men, were shocked, found the discourse hard, and walked no more with Christ. Not so Judas. He was content to let Peter speak, apparently in his name as well as that of the other ten, and say, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." He did not care to bring the matter to an issue. He was content, as a worldly man, to hold his tongue;—inwardly, he had no real belief of all these high mysteries; inwardly, he thought them extravagant, and did not really receive them; yet he held on, having, no doubt, some respect—how could he fail to have it?—for the Lord and His often-witnessed power, yet really, and in heart, estranged by unbelief from His doctrine, and contemning the credulity and simplicity of the other apostles.

See him next as the steward, so to speak,—the man of business, if I may be allowed the expression,—the banker of the sacred company. He had the bag. It was his part to buy what the Lord and His brethren needed. He was employed to be the

almoner in gifts to the poor. He took upon himself to find fault with what seemed to his poor ideas of devotion the needless waste of the costly ointment wherewith Mary anointed the Lord to His burying.

But the steward was dishonest. Professing to be anxious to save for the sake of the poor, he was really a thief, and purloined continually from the little store that was entrusted to his care.

And such was Judas when the awful season of the Passion drew near: an apostle, a missionary, a worker of miracles, an inward unbeliever in the deep spiritual doctrines of his Lord, yet not devoid, we may suppose, of some kind of regard and attachment, and belief too in his Lord's power; a man of worldly shrewdness and experience, but secretly, and unknown to his brethren, covetous and dishonest; a mixed, dangerous, uncertain character, as we should judge him; devoid of the deep principle of faith; untrue, yet fair seeming, and with some kind of attachment; such an one as might—we might think—by possibility even yet turn and repent, and believe and be saved.

But mark, brethren, how it was that the last spark of hope was extinguished, *what* it was that hurried him headlong into the abyss of sin and ruin.

It was the touch of *reproof* that slew him, that hastened the death of which the faithless man was dying.

When Mary poured the box of precious ointment on the head of the Lord as He sat at meat, Judas—and perhaps he led some other of the apostles to concur unawares in his objection—feigned indignation, and complained of the waste of that which might have been given to the poor^d. When the Lord calmly rebuked the objectors, “Let her alone; why trouble ye the woman!” and spoke in terms of high praise of her devotion, the other apostles who may at first have concurred in finding fault with Mary’s act, received the rebuke in meekness, and said no more. But Christian reproof stings the faithless to the quick. Judas could not bear it. “Then entered Satan into Judas, surnamed Iscariot, being of the number of the twelve^e.” Instantly, as we read in St. Matthew and St. Mark, Judas sought the chief priests. He knew well what they wanted,—the opportunity of seizing the Lord by night. Covetousness and the burning sense of indignation conspired together within him. “What will ye give me, and I will deliver Him unto you? And they covenanted to give him thirty pieces of silver. And from that time he sought opportunity to betray Him.”

What *reproof* thus began, *exposure* completed. When at the last supper the Lord mournfully announced to the twelve that one of them should betray Him, and in answer to the enquiry of the

^d Compare St. Matt. xxvi. 8, and St. John xii. 4.

^e St. Luke xxii. 3.

beloved Apostle and St. Peter, pointed out the traitor by giving him the sop, then again, and finally, Satan entered into him. He became demoniac. The spirit of revenge, added to the covetousness and indignation felt before, seized him altogether. A strange sense of injury done to him—for he may, perhaps, have distinguished between a sin meditated and a sin executed—seems to have added keenness to the pang, and with the calm, mournful words, “That which thou doest do quickly,” he passed from the scene of love, the reach of grace, and the hope of heaven, to purchase utter, hopeless death of body and soul for thirty miserable pieces of silver.

Yet even to the last, in spite of the bribe given and received, in spite of the hypocritical kiss whereby in the garden he distinguished the Lord from the apostles for the very purpose of betraying Him, the miserable man seems to have cheated himself into thinking that he meant no harm. He *only* pointed Him out in the evening, who all day long was teaching in the Temple, yet they laid no hands upon Him. What could be, he might ask himself, the serious harm of this, considering how innocent He was, so as to escape condemnation, and how powerful, so as to be able to avert it? This, it seems to me, we must naturally conclude from the fact recorded by St. Matthew^f, that within a few hours, in the course of that very night, finding that

^f St. Matt. xxvii. 3.

neither the Lord's innocence nor His power had saved Him from being condemned by the Sanhedrim to death,—even before the trial which took place in the Prætorium,—he was seized with remorse for his deed, and in some sense *repented*: repented, that is, with that ungodly sorrow of the world that worketh death^s; for he threw the wretched pieces of money which he had received into the Temple, when the chief priests refused to take them back, and went and hanged himself; so that he actually died, in all probability, before his Lord whom he had betrayed. His soul had probably reached its own melancholy place before the soul of the Lord and the penitent thief were together on that awful day in paradise.

I know not how it is possible to exaggerate the interest, the deep and terrible interest, of this narrative. Judas is, perhaps, the only one of the sons of men of whom we seem to know for certain that his soul is lost; and yet what a life, what privilege, what station, what opportunities were his! Terrible as was his guilt,—a guilt which Holy Scripture seems to set in the very forefront of sin,—yet how different was it from much that there seems to be in the world,—from the savage, cold-hearted, unremorseful guilt which we often hear of in lower ranks of life, from the cold, profligate, scheming, life-long villainy which we sometimes are conscious of in the higher!

But oh! brethren, how awful is the warning which it gives to us,—to us who, by education, by station, and our various duties, approach more nearly to the fallen apostle's knowledge, opportunities, and dangers! If we might be at a loss to understand the design of God in allowing him, unchecked, to pass through his deepening course of sin to its consummation, as far as regards himself, is not the merciful purpose most clear, most patent, as regards us?

He knew whom He had chosen! He knew each one of the twelve in all his weakness and waverings of mind. He knew the Stone, the Sons of Thunder, the Twin, the Publican, the Zealot, and the rest, not more thoroughly, nor less thoroughly, than He knew the traitor. His almighty Spirit knew what was in man, and watched, and saw, and foreknew, and helped, and traced to the end the various course of all whom He had chosen.

And not less deeply, brethren, not less thoroughly or searchingly, doth He know us,—us, whom He hath baptized, whom He hath engrafted as branches of the Living Vine, whom He hath made to drink into the one Spirit, whom He hath set in our own places in His Church, whom it is His holy will to save eternally, if we will be saved.

But oh! let us take deep into our hearts the warning history of the lost apostle.

How closely it touches us!

1. He was an apostle, in close and constant near-

ness to the Lord. But who is brought nearer to Christ than we are? Have we not known Him, knelt to Him, prayed to Him, heard of Him from our infancy? Are not the very earliest recollections of our childhood mixed up with the sweet remembrances of hymn, and catechism, and church, and prayers,—the love of earthly parents blended, deliberately and continually blended, with the thoughts of Christ and heaven? Have we not been baptized into Him? have we not in Confirmation made solemn and personal acknowledgment of Him, and in the Holy Communion been continually blest with the nearest and most mysterious union with Him?

We are closer, nearer, more wonderfully near to Him now that He is in heaven, than ever was Judas when He was on earth.

But, brethren, nearness of body and closeness of station are, alas! not necessarily nearness of soul; and it is possible that we may partake of every ordinance of religion, yes, and flock in crowds to hear the words of Christian truth and warning, and yet in our inner selves be far, unspeakably far, and going further and further, from Christ, because we will not give up our hearts to Him, that we may have life!

We read the Word of God, we study it, we hear it, we know more of it perhaps than our neighbours do,—but to accept it, to believe it, to yield ourselves up to it, to live according to it, to feed upon it, to know, and act as knowing, that “man doth

not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God ;" this, and only this, will make all that nearness, and all that knowledge, the blessing that it should be, that it may be, that it *must* be, unless it is to be turned into a curse instead of a blessing, and bring us into a miserable likeness with the lost apostle.

2. But again : from the Lord's side Judas was sent forth, *one of two*, to preach, to work miracles, to announce the kingdom ; and no doubt his own inner heart of unbelief was undiscovered by the poor people whom he addressed. He, no doubt, preached well, for he was a shrewd man ; he did works of power in His Master's name, and he returned, unknown and undetected, except by the Lord, in whose name and power the works had been done. And we, brethren,—many of us as clergymen now, many more as designing and hoping to become so hereafter,—each, may be, to be *one of two*, rector or curate, perhaps, among simple people, where we may be thought to "preach well," or otherwise to do "considerable things" in our parish or sphere,—should we not search our hearts narrowly, lest there should be in us that "evil heart of unbelief," which even in the midst of holiest offices, and fair-seeming service, would surely make us and our work utterly hollow and worthless in the sight of God ? Indeed, it may be so. It is not the holiness of the service which can sanctify the heart of man. Unless the heart be kept in faith and un-

reserved devotion to God, unless the work be done in God, and for Him, the grace of God continually won in prayer to keep our will with His will, and to bless our efforts, the very holiness of the service might possibly operate to increase the danger, and throw into wider divergence the outward seeming faith from the real faithlessness within.

3. The first thing that, as far as we are told in Holy Scripture, probed to the quick the faithlessness of Judas, was the doctrine of the Holy Communion of the Body and Blood of Christ, as taught by our Lord in the sixth of St. John. Brethren, we live in anxious days, and the doctrine of the Holy Communion, in its lofty and blessed mystery, is still to many the very touchstone of faith. Many find "the saying" of that wonderful doctrine "hard," and will not walk with Christ in His Church because of it. With such as thus depart from us we have at present no concern: they have their condemnation elsewhere. The case of *Judas* warns those who still outwardly walk with Christ, who do *not* leave His company, who partake of the blessed feast themselves, who even consecrate it, who are actually the instruments of conveying the true spiritual food of souls to many a simple and faithful communicant, and yet in their hearts rebel against the vital and mysterious truth, and believe it not,—to whom the glorious doctrine of the spiritual eating of the Body and Blood of Christ, of the in-dwelling of Christ, and of the union with Him, of the cleansing

of the body and the washing of the soul, of the assurance of God's favour and goodness, of our being very members incorporate in the mystical Body of Christ, and heirs through hope of the kingdom, and of the preservation of our bodies and souls to everlasting life, in the sacred communion of the Lord's Supper, sounds like empty words of vain superstition, which in their inward heart of hearts they do not entertain or believe. Are there such among us? God knoweth. Brethren, be warned and watchful. The poison of such unbelief is secret and slow; it takes many disguises; it looks at one time like philosophy, at another like liberality, at another like pure spiritual religion,—but it is indeed the working of the evil heart of unbelief, and it secretly divides the inward soul from God. In the case of Judas, the particular doctrine which acted as the touchstone of his faithlessness was the doctrine of the Holy Communion of the Body and Blood of Christ. In other cases it may be the doctrine of holy Baptism, or the doctrine of the Atonement of Christ for sin, or the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, or the doctrine of the Church, the Body of Christ; but whichever it be of those things which the Holy Spirit hath revealed for the salvation of men, such resistance to the truth of God operates to carry away the soul, and divide it off from Christ, and even under external circumstances of apparent nearness, to remove it far away from His grace, and the vital fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

4. But there was a moral canker in the heart of Judas, too,—a corroding, deep-seated moral evil, which worked with his want of faith, encouraged and deepened it, which was partly cause and partly consequence of it; he was *covetous and dishonest*; and his covetousness and dishonesty, acting in constant tamperings with the small store committed to his keeping, made it impossible for him to yield up his whole soul to faith and devotion.

Brethren, I have spoken of the danger which we, and such as we, may possibly incur, of latent want of faith, deep-seated unbelief, even though we be brought so near to Christ as we are in education, knowledge, and duties. Believe me, that in such secret *moral canker* as we read of in Judas Iscariot, lies the strength, the support, the incurable hopelessness of this unbelief. If there be in the heart of those who come *ever so near* to Christ and His service, hoarded and housed, the secret plague of moral sin—be it dishonest love of money, as it was with Judas—be it restless ambition—be it the busy devil of lust, soliciting the secret imagination, and not driven out—be it sullenness and swelling discontent—be it fierce and angry temper—be it what it may, that inwardly tyrannizes over the heart of him who outwardly approaches near to his Lord, and is to all appearance busy and faithful in His service—if there be such, and it be not conquered and driven out in the strength of prayer, and inward combating with evil by the grace of the Holy

Spirit, *faith cannot be* ; faith, even if it have begun to spring, even if to some extent it have been real, (as in some sort we may suppose it once to have germinated even in the traitor's mind,) *faith must die*. Invisibly, secretly, the heart of faith is chilled, and it dies. Others do not suspect it—the unhappy unbeliever does not half realize it. He keeps his learning, his logic, his eloquence, his powers of argument, his station, his duties ; he is outwardly just what he was—he is, perhaps, a strong, perhaps a successful, vindicator of the truth—able to say, Lord, Lord, have I not preached in Thy name, and in Thy name done many wonderful works ? but the secret soul is cold, the well of living water is dried up in his heart,—*faith is dead within him*.

Brethren, I speak as unto wise men ; judge ye what I say. I will not dilate upon it. I speak to consciences—to those who would fain have peace in believing—to those who feel in their heart of hearts that they do desire to live the life of the faithful, and die the death of the righteous. If you do not do battle with your own secret plague of heart, your love of money, or power, or lust, or sloth, or falsehood, or temper, or whatever other inward evil you are conscious of—do battle with it, and in the strength of grace *conquer* it ; it will eat out the very heart of faith within you, and leave nothing there but a hollowness, an ache, a void, which is despair.

5. In the lost apostle all this fatal decay was unseen, save by the eyes of God, till, as I before ob-

served, the touch of *reproof* first, and then *exposure*, brought on the crisis. Then unbelief broke out into open rebellion ; and the dishonest steward tried to comfort himself in detection by revenge.

And O ! brethren, think how deadly to the faithless is the word of Christian reproof ! Think what a trial, what a test it is of the meekness, the faithfulness, the soundness of our heart, when anything brings upon us the voice of rebuke—faithful rebuke, and others hear it ! Could not any person whose position or duty calls upon him sometimes to reprove—could not the parish clergyman—could not the college tutor, tell you how poisonous and deadly to the faithless public words of reproof are ? Even to such as are faithful at heart, though erring, they are a fierce trial ; but the grace of God working upon such as are really right within, may so support and uphold the better feelings as to overcome the dangerous rising of the rebellious spirit ; and so reproof may only kill the sin, and help to save, instead of killing, the sinner. But if the inward heart be faithless, if a moral canker, such as I have spoken of, have been allowed to eat out the very core of divine faith within us, then the touch of Christian reproof operates as the touch of death. It is like the touch of the angel's spear, at which the evil spirit, before latent, starts forth in his full and hideous dimensions. It transforms the fair-seeming but hollow-hearted servant into the open and energetic rebel. O ! let us watch our hearts, brethren, when rebuke—and I would use the word

“rebuke” largely, so as to include all serious and thoughtful reproof, from whencesoever it arises—when rebuke comes upon us, for indeed it is a fiery trial. Nothing searches more closely, nothing shews more clearly what manner of spirit we are of,—whether we can yield, and amend, and pray, and bear, or whether we rise up in furious wrath against the voice of reproof, and exhibit in our rage the absence of true, meek, and patient faith within us.

Such then, brethren, seem to be the main points of Judas’s character, as shewn in Holy Scripture. I have regarded him as the apostle, the missionary, the faithless man, the covetous, dishonest man, the traitor. Much, much more might I have said on each point, to shew how near to ourselves dangers are very like to those which ruined him, and how careful and full of prayer must be our watchfulness if we would avoid them.

For indeed, brethren, our position as persons of intellectual cultivation, brought very near to God by our station in His Church, and our partaking in the studies and devotions of this Christian place of study, is one which is not more eminent in privilege than in danger. And there is *that* in the free habits of *thought* in so large a community, and still more there is that in the free habits of *life* too current here among many young men,—habits, I mean, of expense, and idleness, not to speak of more distinct profligacy and sin, which throws the *danger* of such cultivation and nearness to God into most striking and fearful light. We may

become lamps of God in the world, lighted from the source of light, and shining,—honoured, and effective instruments in the hands of God, to spread and make winning His worship and obedience among tens of thousands of our countrymen ; but we may be so living, yes, even now and here, as to kill the spark of faith within our hearts, and become, even though men may not see it or suspect it, traitors in heart, false and lost apostles, aliens really, however externally looking like honoured citizens of the commonwealth of God. And these are the seasons, brethren, to search our hearts as in the sight of God, and assure ourselves that we are not wandering away from grace and faith. These are the solemn penitential times to examine our own ways, and confess our sins, and turn to God in true confession, and earnest unreserved devotion. What is the good of all our learning, or anything else that we possess, if faith dies within us, and we lose our souls ? or what shall a man give, or take, or win, in exchange for his soul ? I thank God that He has put it into the heart of those who have authority among us, to call us together in this holy season, and that He gathers so many thus to hear the solemn words which belong to this time ; but, brethren, beyond and above such things as this, far beyond and above these outward ordinances of religion, the real battle of faith is to be waged in our separate hearts ; the real conquering of doubts, the real mastery of sin, the real subjecting of our spirits to the Holy Spirit of God, and of our wills to His

will, is the work of our secret souls before God. It is to be done in our chapels, in our chambers, on our knees, in our secret turnings of soul to God by night and day, alone and in company, in work and refreshment.

All the apostles were weak. We may have shared the impetuosity of Peter, the doubtfulness of Thomas, the angry temper of the sons of Zebedee, the love of money of Matthew, the weakness or evil which may have tempted other apostles. But they turned, they repented, they yielded themselves up in faith, they devoted themselves in body and soul to Christ, their Redeemer and their God.

Christ knew those whom He chose. He knew them in all their various wilfulnesses and wanderings, and led them safely—for they were willing to come to Him, that they might have life—through repentance to salvation.

And He knows *us* too; each single one here present, in his own place, and station, and duties, He knows as deeply and as thoroughly as He knew them. He knows what He has given us. He knows our opportunities, and the use we have made of them. He knows how far we have resisted His gracious design to sanctify and save us. He has noted down our sins. There is not a thought in our hearts, nor a word on our lips, nor has there been a secret act in all our lives, but He knoweth it altogether.

And as truly as He knows, so truly does He

love us still. For does He not spare us? does He not assemble us to hear His truth? does He not call us to repentance? Is it not His love which opens our hearts to think sorrowfully of our sins? Does He not even now pray for us? *for us*, who have offended against Him so often and so deeply,—that *yet, even yet*, we may have the heart to turn away from sin, and be won, by His unwearied and most tender yearning love, to faith and repentance!

Can it ever be that He should say of us, “I pray not for you all? There are some of you who have persisted in grieving My Holy Spirit, whereby ye were sealed to the day of Redemption,—who have shut your ears to warnings, who have chosen death. I pray not for you all. I pray for those who, though they have often been weak and wilful, yet do receive My words, do desire to repent, do really wish to work out their own salvation by My freely offered grace in holy fear and trembling.”

Brethren, may God grant that we may be counted among such as these,—followers of the repentant, faithful, saintly eleven; and that, turning away from our sins, and rendering ourselves up to Christ in simple, devoted, honest faith, we may by that grace escape from the faithless spirit, the moral canker, the fierce rebellion, the treason, and the despair of the lost apostle!

DELAY IN RETURNING TO GOD.

A SERMON,

PREACHED IN

THE CHURCH OF ST. MARY-THE-VIRGIN,
OXFORD,

ON WEDNESDAY, MARCH 18, 1857.

BY

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M DCCC LVII.



A SERMON,

&c.

LUKE xix. 41—44.

“And when He was come near, He beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation.”

THREE times we read that our Lord wept: once from sympathy, the tears stealing in silence down His cheeks ^a, when He stood by the grave of Lazarus, and caught the sorrowful influence by which He was surrounded, even while the words which were to summon the dead man back to life were trembling on His lips; once from personal suffering, when, in intense mental agony, “with strong crying and tears, He offered up prayers and supplications unto Him that was able to save Him from death^b,”—mysterious but unequivocal proof of the

^a John xi. 36: ἐδάκρυσεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς.

^b Heb. v. 7: Δεήσεις καὶ ἱκετηρίας . . . μετὰ κραυγῆς ἰσχυρᾶς καὶ δακρύων προσενέγκας.

verity of His human nature, and of the depth of humiliation to which, for our sakes, He had submitted; and once, as we have just heard, from compassion, when the sight of Jerusalem, fresh bursting upon His view, called into His thoughts the past history and the future of that guilty city, and reminded Him that the last sands of the last hour of its day of grace were running out, and that the terrible but well-merited consequences of neglected privileges and slighted warnings were on their way to overtake it, and He gave vent to His deep emotion in sobs and broken lamentations^c.

What an affecting lesson does this last instance hold out to us, and how nearly does it concern us! We, too, have each a day of grace, a season of visitation, as truly as Jerusalem; and the compassionate Saviour watches over us with the same lively interest, — grieving if we suffer it to pass away and be lost for ever, rejoicing if we know it, prize it, and avail ourselves of it. May we have grace to learn the lesson!

As a help towards our learning it, I propose to follow out the subject thus brought before us; and I pray God so to enable me to unfold and apply the great and important truths contained in it, and so to shed forth His Holy Spirit upon our hearts, that those, if any such be here, who are pursuing a course of sin, or living in the neglect of

^c Ἰδὼν τὴν πόλιν ἔκλαιον ἐπ' αὐτῇ, λέγων, Ὅτι εἰ ἔγνων, καὶ σὺ, καὶ γὰρ ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ σου ταύτῃ, κ.τ.λ.

religion, may be aroused to a sense of their danger, and persuaded to return to God without delay; and that those who by God's grace are walking in the way of righteousness, may be stirred up to increased earnestness, under a more lively sense of the importance of the work which lies before them, of the greatness of the privileges which they possess, and of the constraining nature of the claims which their gracious and loving Master has upon them, for their entire and unreserved dedication of themselves to His service.

Now there are two principal points to be considered :—

I. What we are to understand by the day of grace, the time of visitation, in the case of individual Christians.

II. The evil and danger of neglecting it.

I. God is said to visit both in mercy and in judgment; and both kinds of visitation are spoken of in the text,—a visitation in judgment consequent upon a visitation in mercy. But the visitation with which we are at present concerned, and that which in the text is described by name as such, is a visitation in mercy. This may be in the way of temporal chastisement, as well as in the way of temporal blessings or of spiritual privileges. Jerusalem, or (to enlarge the circle, yet not beyond the range of our Lord's meaning,) the Jewish nation, had been visited in all of these ways. In earlier times, God had crowned it with blessings in matters pertaining to this life,

insomuch that it was a most just complaint which he made even as regards these: "What could have been done more to My vineyard, that I have not done in it?" In later times, and very signally within the century preceding our Lord's ministry, chastisements had been the shape which God's visitations had taken. The Jews had been subjugated by the Romans, and eventually their country reduced to the form of a province—sources of perpetual and most galling mortification and humiliation. But the visitation which, above all others, it may be presumed that our Lord had in view, was the visitation of unspeakable spiritual privileges, which had of late been accorded to them, and which was fast drawing to its close—a visitation such as no nation on earth ever had before or since. For three years the Son of God had gone in and out among them, in human form, speaking as never man spake, working miracles, holding forth the example of His most holy life. But they had had neither eyes to see nor ears to hear. And now He had come up to Jerusalem for the last time. Four days more, and His last mighty work would be wrought, His last gracious word spoken, His last agony endured, and then their time of visitation would be closed. They would still indeed be suffered to continue for a brief space; nay, (such was His wondrous mercy,) to them first, with all their guilt, that blessed Gospel would be proclaimed, which was to offer

^d Isa. v. 4.

pardon through the blood which their hands were about to shed ; and individual converts would be gathered from among them ; but as a nation, their day of grace would be at an end. A few more years, during which they should become more and more hardened, and more and more abandoned, and the measure of their iniquity would be full, and the wrath which they had long been treasuring up against the day of wrath would come upon them to the uttermost.

Now God's dealings with Jerusalem answer to His dealings with individuals among His people in every age, and under every dispensation. His aim is to keep them steadfast in His service ; or, if they have unhappily forsaken it, to bring them back to it again. And He has various ways of doing this, though they may all be reduced to one or another of the three classes which have been referred to in the case of Jerusalem, — temporal mercies, chastisements, spiritual privileges ; unless, indeed, we add, as a distinct head, the strivings of His Spirit within, often without any external exciting cause.

With regard to those who are walking steadily and consistently in the ways of God, their visitations come sometimes in the shape of temporal blessings, which, while they so walk, are blessings of a truth, being received as gifts from their good and gracious God, tokens of His Fatherly love, earnest and foretastes of better and more enduring

blessings hereafter ; sometimes in the shape of trials, it may be of the sharpest and severest kind, but trials which their faith recognises as sent by the same loving hand, and interprets (and well it may) as blessings, not less than those which are more apparently such ; sometimes, or rather at all times, in the shape of spiritual privileges and advantages, which, like the water of that spiritual rock which followed the Israelites during their journeys in the wilderness, accompany them throughout their course, seeing that they have the Holy Spirit dwelling within them, and that they have continual communion with the Father and the Son, by the Holy Spirit. These, however, do know the things that belong unto their peace ; they do know the day of their visitation. What remains is, that they should continue to know, that they should continue to prize their privileges, and be increasingly diligent in the use of them, and hold them fast to the end. For God does not bind Himself to continue them to any man at all hazards. They may be abridged, they may be suspended, they may be taken away altogether.

And this brings me directly to the point in hand, —the case where men have turned aside from the right way, and where God visits expressly for the purpose of calling to repentance.

Suppose, then, that one of the class of which I spoke just now has relaxed his watchfulness,

and has been seduced into some forbidden path. The consequence will be self-reproach, and the withdrawal of whatever measure of peace and satisfaction, and cheering sense of God's favour, had been enjoyed previously. Thus God visits ordinarily in the first instance, by inward rebuke before any outward call is sent. Happy for those who recognise His voice and hearken to it, and return, with broken, contrite hearts, as Peter did when his Lord's upbraiding look pierced his inmost soul, without delay.

But if this fails, God has other methods, one or more of which He ordinarily tries, before He abandons them. I say ordinarily, because He does not always; and herein lies the great danger, even at the outset, of forsaking the good ways of God. A man may be cut off before opportunity is afforded for other visitations; or there may be something so peculiarly aggravated in his case, that God may see fit to leave him to himself, without further interference. "Ephraim is joined to idols, let him alone^e." Ordinarily, however, it is otherwise. It was not once, nor twice only, that the compassionate and long-suffering Saviour had wooed Jerusalem to repentance. "*How often*," (were His words, spoken two days later than those in the text, and in most entire harmony with them)—"*How often* would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen

• Hos. iv. 17.

gathereth her chickens under her wings," and, alas! "they would not¹."

God often deals, then, by those who have fallen, as He did by David. He sends some messenger to them, whether in the public ministration of His word, or in the shape of pointed personal expostulation and reproof, urged home by some faithful pastor or friend, whose eye has sorrowfully marked the declension which, as yet, possibly has escaped the notice of others less interested in their welfare. Or even without employing such direct means, He has a thousand ways to fasten conviction upon their consciences, which to man might seem mere accident. A passage of Scripture read again and again before, but never noticed till then, a book taken up at random, a remark casually let fall, a child's artless question—any of these may be as that arrow shot from a bow at a venture (and yet not at a venture as regarded the Almighty hand which was on the hand which shot it) which smote the king of Israel between the joints of his harness².

Yet these, too, may fail of the designed effect. Conviction may be stifled, repentance deferred to a more convenient season. Then, it may be, God changes entirely the character of His visitation. He sends some severe chastisement. Perhaps, in the downward course on which the unhappy man has entered, there is a sudden fall into some gross sin, and he is put to shame, with character forfeited

¹ St. Matt. xxiii. 37.

² 1 Kings xxii. 34.

and reputation blasted, in the sight of the world ; or if matters have not been suffered to run to this extremity, other trials are sent, one object, at least, of whose errand, however it may escape the notice of those around him, he possibly is not slow to divine. Happy, indeed, for him if they do not find him by this time past hope of recovery, his heart hardened as a flint stone, and dead to all religious impressions.

Thus far I have endeavoured to trace God's method of visitation, as exemplified in the case of persons who once were in earnest in religion. Let me turn to other instances.

There are those of whom it can scarcely be said that they ever manifested any decided earnestness in such matters. They have been preserved, it may be, from the greater sins, and their character is unimpeached and unimpeachable as regards their dealings with their fellow-men. Still it is too plain that, as far as God and heaven are concerned, neither has had any real place in their hearts. They would scarcely have lived otherwise than they have done, in any essential points, if they had been without belief in their existence. Gratitude to God, love to Christ, desire after that spiritual blessedness which is, and will be for ever, the portion of the saints—these have never been among the motives which have influenced them.

This is one class ; and there is another with which, however, it must not be confounded for a

moment,—that of those who not only are strangers to earnestness in religion, strangers to the influence of the great motives of the Gospel, but are living in the practice, more or less habitual, of grave sins.

These classes also have their day of visitation, wherein God graciously calls them to repentance, and sets before them the things which concern their peace; not, indeed, in a way essentially different from that in which He deals by those who, having once walked with Him, have afterwards turned aside from His paths, but with such modifications of that way as are suited to their respective circumstances. There may be cases, even here, in which He uses gentle means for fastening conviction upon the conscience; some word spoken in season, some gracious manifestation of His goodness; the still small voice being preferred to the whirlwind, and the earthquake, and the lightning: but, as a general rule, He deals with such persons by a sterner method,—arousing them, it may be, to a sense of their danger, and setting before them the importance of earnestness in religion, by some alarming providence; sparing them, for example, when others at their side are swept away, or depriving them of those whom they loved as their own souls, or stretching them upon a bed of sickness, and terrifying them with the near prospect of an eternity for which they have made no preparation.

These are the ordinary ways in which God visits when He would call men to repentance, allotting

one to one, another to another, as His wisdom sees fit ; and, besides these, there are those general appeals which are made to all in such a land as this. Not to mention those baptismal privileges which follow us throughout our course, witnesses against us, indeed, if we fail to improve them, but unspeakable blessings if we prize them and avail ourselves of them—the very fact of our living in a Christian country, breathing, so to speak, a Christian atmosphere, with a thousand holy influences around us, such as none probably can appreciate but those who know by an actual residence in a heathen land what it is to be without them ; the grosser vices discountenanced, and driven into dark corners ; the examples of good men meeting us in our path ; Sunday coming round, week by week, and at least giving us the opportunity of availing ourselves of its privileges ; church-bells inviting us to God's house, the Church's ordinances provided for us there, if we accept the invitation ; prayers put into our mouths to offer, holy Scripture read in our hearing, and explained, and applied, and pressed home upon our consciences by God's ministers, and the Bread of life set before us on the Lord's Table—what are these but so many instances of privileges which are free to every one in such a land as this, and of which every one will have to give account when God reckons with him for the manner in which he has availed himself of his day of visitation !

II. And this brings me to that other point which

we have to consider—the evil and danger of slighting God's call, of trifling with the convictions which He may have fastened upon the conscience, and the consequent necessity of an immediate return to Him. And it is a matter of the gravest moment, as indeed to all, so especially to those who belong to one or another of the classes of which I have spoken, who have either forsaken the paths of righteousness and peace in which they once walked, or who never walked in such paths, but have lived all their lives to all practical purposes without God ; and if any such be here present, I bespeak their most serious attention. The very circumstance that such a subject has been brought before them is a fresh instance of God's gracious purposes towards them. He is even now calling them to repentance. Let them take heed how they trifle with the call.

Now one very obvious risk which men run when they neglect God's call to repentance is, that it may be the last call they may ever have. They may be standing, even now, on the verge of another world ; this night their souls may be required of them. But this is a consideration which men do not readily lay to heart, especially when they are in the full enjoyment of health and strength. And it is remarkable that Scripture lays comparatively little stress upon it. "The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this

present world ; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ ; who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works ^h :”—Christ’s coming is the great event to which the thoughts of Christians are directed, and for which they are bid to hold themselves in readiness. And, indeed, to all practical purposes the day of his death is to each man the day of Christ’s coming ; for there is no space for repentance in the interval between the two events. Such as we are at death, such shall we be found when Christ comes.

But, as I said, men do not easily realize the thought of death, hardly even when they see those struck down at their side who a few days or weeks before seemed to bid as fair for life as themselves. And they are tempted to set aside the duty of attending, without delay, to these great matters, in the hope that whenever their time shall come, they shall have sufficient leisure and opportunity to prepare, during the sickness which is to usher in death, or in the old age whose immunity from the passions and follies of youth will itself prove, it may be hoped, a fit training season for that eternity on the confines of which it stands.

But nothing can be more fallacious than such an expectation. Who can be sure that he shall have

^h Titus ii. 11—14.

a time of sickness accorded to him, that he shall not be cut off suddenly by some unlooked-for accident, or by one or another of those diseases which accomplish their fatal mission in a few hours, or even by a stroke?

But suppose it otherwise. No one who knows what a sick and dying chamber is, would regard it for an instant as affording a favourable opportunity for accomplishing that great work of conversion which ought to have been done in health.

Men fall ill. At first they are not greatly alarmed. They have no idea that their sickness is unto death; and their thoughts and affections still run in their accustomed channels. Thus matters go on for a few days. As the sickness runs its course they become oppressed with it—and that more and more—mentally as well as bodily. They are distracted with pain, or enfeebled by the exhausting nature of the complaint. And when at length the awful reality forces itself, if indeed it ever does, upon their conviction, they are too ill to give their minds to the subject. It is too late. Their day of visitation has come and gone, and they knew it not. They die as they lived: not always, nor indeed often, except, perhaps, in one awful case, in great agony and distress of mind,—their illness possibly has dulled their faculties and blunted their perceptions,—but making no sign of true contrition, giving no token of faith in their Saviour's blood; or if they speak, as it sometimes happens, (where they have been

tutored so to speak,) in terms of confident assurance, affording no reason to their friends to hope that there was any solid ground for such assurance to rest upon. The case which I have described is one of frequent occurrence, and it shews how little illness is to be depended upon as a fit season for the great work of turning to God.

But even where it is otherwise, and under the most favourable circumstances, no wise man, even supposing he could be sure that such would be his lot, would think such a season comparable to the time of health and strength ; or any future season comparable to the present ; not to speak of the shameful ingratitude—not to call it impiety—of putting God off with the dregs of a life, the prime and vigour of which have been dedicated to the service of another master.

And what shall we say of age reserved as a hopeful season for conversion ? Surely here is the same risk, the same folly, the same ingratitude, the same impiety, only in a greater degree.

For as regards the risk and the folly, whether men are reckoning upon a time of sickness or upon old age, there is this most grave and momentous consideration to be taken into account, and in the present instance most especially so, inasmuch as it is that to which the parallel case of Jerusalem directly points,—that the longer repentance is delayed, the more difficult it becomes, and the more unlikely.

Even in the way of natural cause and effect, we

know how callous the mind grows to impressions which it has often resisted. The hopes, the fears, the desires which once would have affected it most sensibly, and which, if yielded to, would have contributed to form habits corresponding, cease to operate; and men come at length to acquiesce in the state in which they find themselves, however repugnant to their better judgment, or to their natural predilection, as though they were spell-bound, and had lost even the wish to escape. And this is increased, as they advance in years, by that indolence and indisposition to change, naturally incident to age, which, like a lengthening chain, clogs them more at every fresh step. And add to all, the false shame which makes men, and that too increasingly, shrink from entering upon a course which will draw upon them the eyes of those around them, and subject them to their remarks and censures. Viewed in this light, nothing can be more hopeless, humanly speaking, than the conversion of an old man whose youth has been passed in the neglect of God; and that of one in middle life is only by so much less hopeless, as his habits of indifference are, as yet, less confirmed.

I say habits of *indifference*; for the cases I have had in view have been rather of a negative than of a positive kind—cases in which men have withheld their hearts and lives from God, but yet without delivering themselves over to the commission of the graver and more flagrant sins. Where these have been yielded to, whether in a single instance or

habitually, there are often additional impediments to repentance thrown in the way, not merely from the greater violence which has been done to conscience, the greater despite to the Spirit of grace, but also from the greater entanglement of such sins, —one drawing another after it, as David's adultery the murder of the injured husband ; or other parties being implicated whom it is felt to be a point of honour not to desert or betray ; or the horror at the crime committed being so overwhelming, (and Satan well knows how to take advantage of this,) that the guilty person sinks into a state of desperation, or gives himself up to "wretchlessness of most unclean living, no less perilous than desperation." Little do men think, when they take the first downward step, how fast and how far they may be precipitated. The "*but for once*" with which they flatter themselves too often proves *for ever*.

So much for the risk of delaying to return to God viewed merely in the light of natural cause and effect. But there is another most important element to be taken into account, viz. that repentance is not ours to exercise when and as we will. It is God's gift, the work of His Holy Spirit, and the very object for which the visitations of which we have been speaking are sent, is that through them He may lead us to repentance. And of all the dangers attending upon the neglect of them, this is the greatest, that we provoke God first to withhold, and eventually to withdraw altogether, the influence of the Spirit. We may still, indeed, be suffered to

live on in the midst of outward calls to repentance. We may have mercies on the one hand, chastisements and warnings on the other, and all the privileges of the Church and of a Christian country attending us to the end of our course; but they may be as music to the deaf, or as cries to the dead. We may be delivered over to that judicial hardness of heart wherewith God visits those in judgment whom He has in vain visited in mercy. That same gracious and loving Saviour who is represented in the text as lamenting over Jerusalem, for that she knew not the time of her visitation, is described elsewhere as sending His prophet to her inhabitants with this fearful message:—"Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but *understand not*; and see ye indeed, but *perceive not*. *Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes*; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed¹." They would not believe and obey God's call, therefore they should not.

And this indeed is the real cause of much of the scepticism, whether secret or avowed, which prevails. It is a judicial punishment, inflicted upon those who have trifled with their convictions, and have refused to deal honestly by themselves. It is not that there is any flaw in the evidence of Christianity, or any lack of proof accessible to them in particular. But the course on which they had entered was one which made it their interest, unless

¹ Isa. vi. 9, 10. Comp. John xii. 40.

they would forsake it and return to God, to wish the Gospel untrue. And thus they learnt to love darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil ; and God gave them over to that darkness.

Such, my brethren, is the risk of delaying to return to God, the danger of trifling with convictions, of suffering the time of our visitation to pass away unheeded and unimproved. Let me speak one word of the ingratitude of such a course. And truly I am ashamed to have spent so much time in urging the duty of an immediate return on lower grounds. As Christians, at any rate, redeemed with the blood of Him to whose service we have been solemnly dedicated, and whom from our childhood we have been taught to acknowledge as *our Lord*, we ought to be susceptible of far higher motives.

And so ought we truly as the creatures which His hand has made. Even natural religion might remind us that we are not our own, that we have no right to live to ourselves. But the Gospel adds another and yet more constraining motive. It teaches us that we have been bought with a price. We were lost and undone ; but the Son of God became man, that as man He might die to rescue us. Shall we requite such wondrous love by giving our youth, and health, and strength, our best years and best energies, to the service of the world, the flesh, and the devil, with the purpose of offering Him in sickness or in advancing years the dregs of a life so spent,—a purpose, as we have seen, even such as it is, little likely to be accomplished ?

And there is yet a further consideration suggested by the character of that gracious Saviour, as set before us in the text. Can we realize the scene there described—behold the Son of God affected even to tears at the sight of that guilty city, hear His lamentations over its waywardness, its obduracy, and its coming woes, and then call to mind that He looks down, even now, with equal interest, equal pity, equal grief, upon each individual among ourselves who is wandering on in the ways of sin, not knowing or not regarding the things which belong unto his peace, and suffering the time of his visitation to pass away and be lost past recal. Can we realize all this, and not blush for shame, if our consciences witness against us that we are ourselves pursuing such a course ?

And yet once more :—Suppose that, through undeserved mercy, and beyond all hope, a man is eventually brought to yield himself up to God, who at one time wilfully refused to serve Him, yet think what bitter regret he will feel, and the more bitter in proportion to his earnestness, at the recollection of so much time wasted, so many talents unimproved, so large a portion of his best years and his best energies withheld from the service of his rightful Lord ; not to speak of habits of sin strengthened by long use, which remind him again and again, by many humiliating outbreaks, of his former slavery. And it is well if he has not even sadder reflections still,—the remembrance of mischief done to others, by his evil example, evil companionship, evil per-

suasion, partners with him in his guilt,—alas! not partners with him in his repentance,—it may be ere this passed into that awful unseen world where remorse takes up its abode, but where repentance is unknown.

But I will not dwell upon this distressing picture. I have said enough to remind you (for no one here needs to be taught it as a thing before unknown) of the danger, the folly, and the ingratitude of trifling with convictions, and of delaying to return to God. Yet when all is said, it is not the mere revolving of these considerations in our minds that will be effectual, but the laying of them seriously to heart; and this can only be by the operation of the Holy Spirit, sought and obtained in prayer.

Let me, in dependence upon the Holy Spirit's aid, briefly gather up what has been said, and press it home upon your consciences.

Are there any here, my brethren, who, though they are not living in the practice of graver sins, are yet strangers to real, earnest religion, their hearts and affections set upon the world, withheld from God? Oh let not the call which is now made upon you be made in vain. Do not rest satisfied with the life which you have led hitherto. You know that it will afford you small comfort to look back upon one day. Seek to have something better to look back upon, not as the ground of your acceptance indeed—that is your Saviour's atoning sacrifice,—but as a witness of your sincerity, and a token of your personal appropriation of that sacrifice. The

unprofitable servant in the parable was not charged with any of the graver sins : he had not been an adulterer, or a drunkard, or a thief : his sin was that he had not improved the talent entrusted to him ; he had buried it in the earth. Yet he was cast forth into outer darkness. Awake, then, from your spiritual slumber, and be in earnest. To-day, while it is called to-day, harden not your hearts. The Spirit of God may be striving with you now for the last time. Harken to Him while yet you may. Begin by prayer. Pray earnestly before you retire to rest this night, that you may have grace to act up to your convictions. Repeat the same prayer on first rising to-morrow. Apply yourselves in earnest to use the various means of grace, especially private prayer and the devout study of Scripture : for where these are diligently attended to, the rest will follow. Seek out companions who are themselves in earnest, and do not be ashamed of their companionship. These may serve as first hints. And I will add no more save this one word, Persevere. Hold on to the end, for God's service is not a matter of impulse, but a *life of consistent and sustained obedience*, begun in Christ and continued in Christ.

And what I have said to those who are strangers to real earnestness in religion, but yet, by God's mercy, are free from graver offences, I say likewise to those, if any such be here, who are not free from such offences ; and I add this besides, Break off at once from the evil practices, the evil habits by which you have been ensnared ; or, rather, first

beseech God to give you grace to break off, and then take some decisive step without delay. Renounce the companionship, give back the ill-gotten gain; whatever it be, let there, if possible, be something definite and tangible which may make you feel that you have crossed the Rubicon,—that you have bid farewell to your former evil course, and that you are in truth and reality soldiers of the cross, in accordance with the vows once solemnly made at your baptism, but long slighted and disregarded. If delay is dangerous in any case, it is especially so in yours, seeing that you have sinned with so high a hand, and done so much to sear your consciences, and advanced so far towards confirmed and irreclaimable impenitence. A little longer time spent in sinful courses, and you will be ready to acquiesce in your condition, as though it were irremediable, as though you were delivered over to do the evil which you do, as though it were a part of your nature, against which it were hopeless to struggle. Or it may be you will take refuge in scepticism, and sin on principle, and glory in your shame.

Let me speak one word also to those who once knew better and happier days, but are now declining from God. Whatever has been said in the two former cases, applies in full force to yours, only with this difference—that yours is as yet less hopeless, inasmuch as conscience is as yet probably more sensitive and more susceptible of the Holy Spirit's influence. But this very circumstance

should make you the more prompt in your return. A little longer delay, a few more steps in the downward course on which you have entered, a little further experience of the deceitfulness of sin, and you will have become reconciled to the evil,—you will have learned to palliate, perhaps to justify, what now you confess to be wrong: and thus matters may continue to the end, and you may die as you have lived; or (what is by no means uncommon where the voice of conscience has been stifled, but never wholly suppressed,—and this is that awful case which I alluded to awhile ago,) your closing hours may be passed in the agonies of remorse—conscience then asserting her supremacy with resistless power,—while at the same time your faith is paralyzed, and you cannot lay hold of that Saviour who was exalted to give repentance and remission of sins^k, but to whose voice you turned a deaf ear when He called you to repentance, and besought you to be reconciled to God^l.

Thank God, then, that matters have not yet run to this extremity. Retrace your steps at once. “Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near.” So doing, the very passage which we have been considering, and which is so full of awful warning to you while you continue in your evil courses, will forthwith beam with encouragement. For like the pillar of cloud which stood between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel, while it is darkness to those

^k Acts v. 31.

^l 2 Cor. v. 20.

who slight their privileges and despise their day of visitation, it is light to those who know, and prize, and improve them. The same Almighty Being who in righteous judgment first gave up Jerusalem to irreclaimable impenitence, and then sent upon her the woes which she had deserved, wept when He thought of those woes. How would He not have rejoiced, had she discerned the things which concerned her peace, and known the time of her visitation ! And how will He not rejoice over you, and welcome you to His arms, and speed you on your heavenward course, assisting you with the gracious influences of His Spirit, if in this your day, while yet that day lasts, you hearken to His voice, and yield yourselves heartily to His service.

Finally, let not those who are striving to walk in the ways of God, miss the lesson which the passage which we have been considering has for them.

Let them rejoice that their eyes have been opened to discern the things which concern their peace, but let them rejoice with trembling. “ We are made partakers of Christ, *if* we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end^m,” not otherwise. The way to preserve our privileges is to live up to them. Especially it behoves us to keep the conscience tender, to beware of hesitating, debating with ourselves, or asking counsel of others, when the path of duty is plain. However seductive the allurements of sin may be, the Christian must at once close both his eyes and his ears ; he is not

^m Heb. iii. 14.

his own—he has been bought with a price. However painful in some instances the obligations which are laid upon him may appear, he must forthwith address himself to fulfil them. It is said of Abraham, that when he had received the command to slay his son, so mysterious to reason, so hard to flesh and blood, “*he rose up early in the morning*,” and set out *at once* upon his most trying journey. He “made haste and prolonged not the time to keep God’s commandments^o.” God was making trial of him not merely whether he would be obedient, but whether his eyes were open to discern the high calling to which He was calling him, (for it is a high calling to be permitted to make sacrifices for God). By God’s grace his eyes were opened, and his faith and obedience are preserved in everlasting remembrance not more for his honour, than for our imitation and encouragement: on the one hand, to teach us to “run the way of God’s commandments;” on the other, to shew us that we shall lack neither His grace to help us, nor His countenance and approbation to reward us, if we yield ourselves to the suggestions of His Holy Spirit.

^a Gen. xxii. 3.

^o Psalm. cxix. 60. “Fidelis obediens nescit moras, fugit crastinum, ignorat tarditatem, præcipit præcipientem, parat oculos visui, aures auditui, linguam voci, manus operi, itineri pedes, totum se colligit ut imperantis colligat voluntatem.”—*S. Bernard, Serm. de Virtut. Obedient.*

*THE CONTEMPT OF OUR LORD BEFORE
PILATE AND HEROD.*

A SERMON,

PREACHED IN

THE CHURCH OF ST. MARY-THE-VIRGIN,
OXFORD,

ON FRIDAY, MARCH 20, 1857.

BY

WALTER KERR,
LORD BISHOP OF SALISBURY.

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M DCCC LVII.



A SERMON,

&c.

ISAIAH L. 6.

“I gave My back to the smiters.”

THESE words of Isaiah refer to events which took place in Jerusalem about 744 years after the Holy Ghost, speaking by the prophet, first uttered them.

At the time to which they pointed, Judæa had become tributary to the Romans, and was part of the province of Syria. There was in this province, as in all others, both a chief governor, or president, and also a procurator, who ordered all things in connection with the tribute. Ordinarily, the procurators had not the power of life and death, but the case of the procurator of Judæa was an exceptional one. Owing to the suspicions entertained of the loyalty of the Jews to the Roman emperors, the procurator of Judæa had the *jus gladii*. Pontius Pilate, who was then procurator, had held his government for about seven years, and had come to Jerusalem from Cæsarea (where he usually

lived), to keep order in Jerusalem during the Pass-over, which was always a season of great national excitement.

I draw attention both to the power exercised by the procurator of Judæa, and also to his presence at Jerusalem, because they are links of that chain which connects the circumstances which are the subject of my address to you this evening, with the words of the prophet,—“I gave My back to the smiters.”

The Roman courts of law were always open for business very early in the day, and on the 14th day of the month Nisan, and in the sixteenth or seventeenth year of the reign of Tiberius Cæsar, the morning was only just come, when a large crowd arrived at the house and judgment-hall of the procurator, and brought with them a Prisoner. It was evident that the charge was supposed to involve life or death, for the Prisoner was “bound,” and chains were a token of the gravity of the charge to be brought against Him. The crowd consisted of the chief-priests, and elders, and scribes, and many, probably, of the people, whom such a procession would attract; and the Prisoner was a Man who had been delivered up to them the preceding night, and whose examination they had already conducted before Annas, and Caiaphas the high-priest. The crowd, however, which had reached the judgment-hall, did not enter it. They thought that by going into the house and court of a Gentile they should

contract such defilement as would unfit them for the ceremonies of their religion.

Nor did Pilate disregard their scruples. As they were afraid of going into the court, he went out to them to hear the charge they brought against their Prisoner. The charge was a strange one. We have indeed but a scanty record^a of the life of Him against whom it was brought, but that record is one continued account of words and deeds of justice, mercy, truth, and obedience; and yet the accusation laid against Him was, that He was an evil-doer, "a malefactor,"—even guilty of such crimes as were not within the cognizance of the judges of His own people, inasmuch as they had been deprived by the Romans of the power of trying capital offences. From the conversation that took place in the court, in private, between Pilate and the Prisoner, it would further appear that the Jews had afterwards specified one evil deed as the chief burden of their charge, and had accused Him of such treasonable conduct as deserved the punishment of the infamous death by crucifixion.

The procurator made three attempts to stay the proceedings, and during this time the Prisoner was exposed to the most grievous insults.

For example, the Jews testified that He was a worse man, and less deserving of mercy, than a certain Barabbas, who was a robber, and had been guilty of sedition and murder.

^a St. John xx. 30, 31; xxi. 25.

Then, again, the governor "took Him and scourged Him^b;" caused Him, that is, to be stripped, tied to a pillar, and beaten with a whip made of leather thongs or twisted cords, sharpened, probably, with small bits of iron or lead at the end, and divided into several lashes called scorpions.

And, lastly, the Roman soldiers, to shew their contempt for such a rival of their emperor, "platted a crown of thorns, and put it on His head, and put on Him a purple robe" or cloak, and in derision saluted Him as King of the Jews, and smote Him with their hands.

All this was done within the court and its precincts, and then, with a view of disarming the malice of His accusers, by exciting either their contempt or their pity, Pilate presented the Prisoner to them clothed in the dress with which the soldiers had vested Him, and the people were challenged to see what an object of contempt and scorn He really was who claimed a kingdom. The accusers then alleged another charge, and said that He was not only guilty of treason, but also of blasphemy. This derisive treatment and injurious accusation immediately preceded the trial, and when Pilate had taken his place on the judgment-seat, and the Prisoner was set before him, the first charge, of treasonable and seditious conduct, was revived. But the trial was soon interrupted. The procurator,

^b St. John xix. 1.

thinking that he might get rid of the case by transferring it to the hearing of Herod Antipas, the tetrarch of Galilee, sent the Prisoner to that wicked man, who had put John the Baptist to death, and who was at this time at Jerusalem.

This change must, we are sure, have greatly aggravated the sufferings of the Prisoner; for though we have no record of the many insults He must have endured in this second passage through the streets of the city, it is recorded^c that Herod and his soldiers “set Him at nought and mocked Him, and arrayed Him in a gorgeous robe, and sent Him again to Pilate.”

Nor have we any account of His third journey through Jerusalem in the midst of an excited and exasperated crowd.

The sacred narrative takes us again directly to the court of Pilate, and tells us that the Jews, in the presence of Pilate, threw fresh scorn and contempt upon any claim the accused, whose name was Jesus, had made to be their King, and pleaded again that mercy should be shewn to a murderer rather than to their Prisoner, and that Pilate at last, though believing that He was innocent, complied, against his convictions, with their wishes, and condemned Him to be crucified. The witness of the Holy Ghost is,—“Then delivered he Him therefore unto them to be crucified^d.”

Such, my brethren, is the record of the scenes in the midst of which, in accordance with your Bishop's

^c St. Luke xxii. 11.

^d St. John xix. 16.

request, I have endeavoured to place you to-night ; and now, whilst you stand there, I would earnestly remind you what are some of the mysteries with which these events are instinct, what appeal they make to your hearts, and what answer your hearts should make to their appeal.

The Prisoner whose treatment and trial before Pilate and Herod you have witnessed, is one of our brother-men.

Of this there can be no question : His lineaments are like your own ; they are those of all the children of Adam.

It is known who are His parents ; the very house, or rather I should say the very stable, in which He was born can be shewn you ; the very manger, in which He was cradled, the owners of the inn could point out to His accusers and judges.

Then there are those close at hand who can tell you that He was subject to the same infirmities as other men. Many can testify that the pains of hunger, which were often His lot, sorely distressed Him.

A certain woman* will tell you that she had drawn water for Him to drink when He was thirsty.

Two sisters† say that, when they were mourning the death of their brother, they found their comfort in the sympathy of His tears.

His countenance bears the marks that His heart had been pierced through with the sharpest pangs of grief.

* St. John iv. 7.

† St. John xi. 35.

“ His pale, weak form
Is worn with many a watch,
Of sorrow and unrest.”

His body is covered with the wounds cut into His flesh by the lash of the scourges. His temples are clotted with the blood which the deep piercings and tearings of the thorns with which He was crowned had caused to flow. Dark bruises tell of the force and power with which Pilate’s ribald soldiery had with their hands smitten His face ; and when you have heard these and many more witnesses, and seen these and many other tokens of His being subject to our pains and infirmities, you cannot but be satisfied that those contemptuous words, “ Behold the Man,” with which Pilate presented Him to the Jews, contained a great catholic truth, and that He whom chief-priests, and elders, and scribes, and Pharisees, and the Roman governor and his soldiers, and the tetrarch of Galilee, loaded with indignities, and punished with buffetings and scourgings as the prelude of His death, was indeed a brother Man, “ of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting ;” or rather, “ a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.”

But still when you heard, as it were, this very night, Pilate’s “ Ecce Homo,” you could not, I think, have been content to bring your thoughts within the narrow limits of his words of pity and scorn. You must, I am sure, have felt anxious questionings whether that brother Man had not

* Christian Year,—Tuesday before Easter.

been made to differ from His brethren. For in the crowd around the judgment-hall and Herod's house there must have been those who said in your hearing, that they had seen the accused do mighty works in God the Father's name, and had heard Him say "that these works bore witness of Him ^h."

Again, another witness may have testified to you that, though he had had an infirmity ⁱ thirty and eight years, he had been made whole by the mere word of that Prisoner.

And another may have declared that he was one of that multitude who had all, to the number of five thousand ^k, been fed on five loaves and two small fishes.

Again, a man blessed with perfect sight may have told you that, whether the accused "was a sinner or no, he knew not; but that one thing he knew, —whereas he was blind he now saw ^l."

And surely, too, there were also in the same company some who proclaimed that they had seen water become wine at His bidding ^m; and others also, must have testified that the same element became like adamant when He trod upon it ⁿ.

And were there not others who, when these sayings reached them, witnessed to even greater wonders? reported how they had seen and talked with a man who, after having been four days in his

^h St. John x. 25.

^k St. Matt. xiv. 15.

^m St. John ii. 9.

ⁱ St. John v. 5.

^l St. John ix. 25.

ⁿ St. Matt. xiv. 20.

grave^o, had been restored to life by Him who was treated with such contempt?

And when the Gentile Pilate and his soldiers were deriding Him, I think some voice may have been heard saying that those mockings, spiteful entreatings, and scourgings, and the sentence of death, proved the Man to be a *Prophet*, for that He had told His disciples but a short time before that so it must be, saying, "Behold we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man shall be accomplished. For He shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on: and they shall scourge Him, and put Him to death^p."

And, not to try to bring to mind more than one more circumstance of that scene, those who heard Him called a Prophet, some in malice, some in awe and wonder, bore witness that this worker of miracles and Prophet had claimed for Himself, in their hearing, not a mere oneness with us in our common manhood, but oneness with the Lord God Almighty; that He had, only a few months back, told the Jews that "God was His Father, thus making Himself equal with God^q;" and afterwards, openly, in Solomon's Porch, had challenged the admission of His claim, saying, "I and My Father are one^r."

^o St. John xi. 44.

^q St. John vii. 18.

^p St. Luke xviii. 31—33.

^r St. John x. 30.

These are, indeed, my brethren, great mysteries, and yet they are only such as we must all, whether old or young, rich or poor, learned or unlearned, believe faithfully, if we would be saved. Whatever may have been the difficulties of those who had to contrast the wonders of that Prisoner's deeds and words—His miracles, His prophecies, His high claims—with the circumstances of His exceeding humiliation, His seeming weakness, and the contempt, and scorn, and cruel mockings with which He was treated; we, at any rate, find no such stumbling-blocks in our way. Apostles, martyrs, confessors, doctors, bishops, priests, deacons, devout laymen, all have helped to smooth our path, and to guide us safely to the knowledge of the revelation which God has made to us of these things in Holy Scripture.

That this is so I will now shew you. The true doctrine with regard to God is, that there is one God, and three Persons in the Godhead,—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost.

Now that Prisoner, of whom, as He stood before Pilate and Herod as a Man “despised and afflicted of men,” we have heard such marvellous reports, was no other than the second Person of the Godhead; He was “the Word of the Father, begotten from everlasting of the Father, the very and eternal God, and of one substance with the Father.”

The Man whom Pilate, and Herod, and the sol-

diers, and the people of the Jews treated with every manner of indignity, was He “whom God had appointed Heir of all things, by whom also He made the worlds; who is the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person, and who upholds all things by the word of His power^t,” even the everlasting Son.

And does any man ask, “How can these things be?” How can God have suffered these indignities, and then have even consummated His sufferings in an agonizing death?

I would answer that man in the words of a great father—“*Accepit ex te, unde moreretur pro te*”^u,” which is but saying what St. John testified—“the Word was made flesh^x,” or in other words, that through our flesh,—that is, through the human nature,—He the Eternal Word, the Prince of Life, the Holy One and the Just, suffered the cruel treatment with which Pilate and Herod afflicted Him. And thus, though it is almost dreadful to say such things, it is perhaps well not to keep back, but to press on your minds the truth, that those temples which were torn by the crown of thorns were the temples of God Himself; that that back which had been bound to a column, and made by the scourgers one large wound, was the body of the Almighty God; and that that face which was smitten with the hands of the soldiers

^t Heb. i. 2, 3.

^u August., t. iv. 1677 D.

^x St. John i. 14.

was the face of Him who was not only perfect Man, but perfect God.

You know well, my brethren, what was the purport of all this in the Divine counsels; that it was that our nature, by its union with the Divine nature, might be able to expiate its sin by suffering, and that so man might be reconciled to God.

But yet I doubt not that another question has arisen in some of your minds—whether, namely, the suffering death of the Son of God, without all these indignities, was not enough; whether the blood God shed on the cross^y was not sufficient to purchase His Church.

All I would say in answer to this question is, that we know but very little of these things; that we can only see one side of these great mysteries, can only grasp the counterparts of these eternal realities, and that, at any rate, what may have been sufficient for our salvation, may not have been sufficient for His love, which made Him ready in taking upon Himself our nature, in order to suffer in our stead, to experience in His own person every sorrow, pain, and trouble to which the nature of man was heir, so that we not only can say, “all we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all^z,” but can also add, “Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows. . . . He was wounded for our

^y Acts xx. 28.

^z Isa. liii. 6.

transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed^a.”

There is also one other great truth connected with all our Lord's sufferings, and so with His treatment at His trial, of which I must now remind you. Those sufferings were not only part of the atoning sacrifice, but in a mysterious way they reach out, as it were, beyond the offering of the sacrifice, and the completion of the atonement, and gather up into themselves the sufferings of the Body of Christ, receive into some kind of fellowship^b with themselves the pains and griefs of those whom God adopts in the Man of Sorrows.

Head and heart, indeed, almost become dizzy in their attempt to master such truths for a moment only in thought, and much more to give utterance to them—to speak of any sufferings as a kind of complement of the sufferings of the Man of Sorrows. But yet we are only saying what St. Paul taught. St. Paul, speaking of his own sufferings, said that he was “filling up that which was behind of the afflictions of Christ in His flesh, for the sake of Christ's Body, which is the Church^c;” and this revelation was made, my brethren, for your instruction, and it is your duty not to close the eyes of your heart against it, but with all thankfulness to

^a Isa. liii. 4, 5.

^b Tantum pateris, quantum ex passionibus tuis inferendum erat universæ passioni Christi.—Aug., t. iv. 591 F.

^c Coloss. i. 24.

say, "Lord, I believe^d," and to express your sense of the greatness of the mystery, and of your want of power to understand it, in the prayer, "Help Thou mine unbelief."

And now I must pass on to another part of my subject.

This knowledge of doctrine, of the great truths connected with the Person and Office of that Man at whose trial you have been present, has a direct bearing on all your deeds, and words, and thoughts. Thus it is that there is truly great blessedness in being allowed to be a witness^e of even such doings as have given Pilate a place of infamy in the creed of the Church, for they tell us what has been done for us, and remind us of what we ought to do for Him who thus suffered in our stead. They address themselves to our bowels of pity and compassion; they appeal to every feeling in our hearts of gratitude; they offer a strong stay and support to our feeble faith.

That this was in part, at least, the purpose of the Eternal Three in ordaining such sufferings, and in giving effect to such counsels, cannot be ques-

^d St. Mark ix. 24.

^e Ut igitur, O homo, scias quanti te æstimaverit Christus, ut compassione patiaris cum illo, utque amoris ipsius vices rependere possis, hortor atque commoneo, quatenus in spiritu in prætorium Pilati introeas, diligentissime que consideres, quid tuus propter te in eo sustineat Deus. Nullus ut arbitror a fletu continere se debet, cum Dei filium, ut ibi durissime flagelletur in prætorium mente conspexerit introduci.—*Laurentius Justinianus de Triumphali Christi Agone*, 259, 2, 70, &c.

tioned ; and you, my brethren, have constant opportunities of giving proof that you have heard and profited by such teaching.

I will give a few examples of what I mean.

One great object of all these cruel indignities was the forgiveness of our sins ; and certainly the whole passion of our Lord,—and this is in one sense His whole life^f,—was so fashioned and wrought out as most persuasively to draw the heart into the acceptance of so great salvation.

We, the ministers of Christ, are constantly asked for appliances wherewith to interest the hearts of men in the well-being of their souls, and the furtherance of their Saviour's glory. And from whence shall we obtain them ? how can we best meet this common demand ? Possibly some of you, my brethren, may at this very moment be feeling the misery of not having a heart of flesh, and of finding no communion between your reason and your affections. Perhaps some of you are, in the absence of the gentle influences of such comfort, becoming more and more alienated from the life of God within you ; grieving, even, may be, quenching, the Spirit of grace. To such as these I would say, I know where those appliances of which I have spoken are to be found ; I know how to direct you to a remedy for that growing hardness of heart.

I would send you to all the sad scenes of your Saviour's passion ; yea, I would venture to content

^f St. Bernard, t. ii. 493.

myself with taking you only to the courts of Pilate and Herod, for I am satisfied that when you are there, you cannot keep that "stoutness of heart" which is your present plague. Though you may not be able to feel for yourselves, you cannot but feel for the sufferings of that holy, righteous, and innocent Man. You can sympathize with a brother in his anguish and cruel treatment, though you have not a tear or a sigh for your own miseries. And then, when I see that your heart is swelling with such pity and sorrow for Him, I would press on your soul the truth that you are yourselves the very cause of that sorrow ; that it was your hardness of heart which nerved the doubting Pilate to stain his hands with the blood of his God.

Such teaching would not, I believe, be in vain. The Holy Ghost would, I humbly trust, so bless it, that when you had seen the Son of Man scourged and buffeted, and crowned with thorns, and clad in purple, and had observed His patience, His gentleness, His resignation, and had received the great truth that this Man was the Son of God, you would not find it difficult to obey the charge of St. Bernard^g :—

"Hic tu O homo totus contremisce, tremore obrigesce, merito expallesce, pugnīs pectus contunde, fletibus totam animam effunde, compatere patienti."

Your hard heart would yield to such influences,

^g St. Bernard, t. ii 540 E.

and by its change would justify the saying of the great preacher of the Eastern Church with regard to them—*κ' αὐτὸς λίθος ἦς, κηροῦ γενήση παντός μαλακώτερος^h*.

Or is there here a man of a somewhat different mould of character from the last, who is not obliged to stimulate his own sluggish feelings by sympathy for others, but has quick and lively affections, and can only not rest them on their true and rightful object?

Then, brother, indeed the judgment-hall is a most fit place for you: put your own self in the place of the suffering Jesus, and the sense of your own condition, its pains and its degradation, will soon, by God's blessing, lead you first to feel for, and then to love, the Man of Sorrows. You will realize, in the breaking forth from your heart of tears of penitence and grateful emotion, the wisdom of the counsel of a great Bishopⁱ of the Church:—

“Hic parumper, O anima mea, considerationis tuæ gressus fige, et redemptoris tui intolerabilem dolorem attende, modum cogita, ludibrium meditare, atque tormenti hujus immanitatem ex te ipsâ metire. Te in personâ statue Domini, taliaque arbitrare esse passuram; capitis delicati sensibilitatem considera, spinarum punctiones cerebrum perforantes mirare, sic que sanguinem decurrentem lacrymarum inundatione absterge.”

Then how many there are whose faith is too weak to embrace the offers of free pardon and

^h Chrysost., t. vii. p. 818 D.

ⁱ Laurentius Justinianus de Triumphali Christi agone, 260, i. 30.

grace ; who are strangers to the merriment of that heart which is only telling of its own blessedness when it sings, "Blessed is the man whose unrighteousness is forgiven, and whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord imputeth no sin ^k."

I would entreat you who are in this condition to allow me to place you continually where you have stood this night, even in Pilate's hall of judgment, and you will there find yourselves in company with those whose faith enables them to experience that joy in the Lord which you lack, but who still find it needful to practise the eye of their soul on such objects as are there disclosed.

Have you committed such sins as you think are not within the limits of God's pardoning mercy? I will not try to take one single grain from the exceeding weight of those offences, which you rightly place in the balance against the mercy of God, but I ask you what it is which you are witnessing?

Is it not the scourging of the Son of God? is it not the buffeting of the face of God's only-begotten One? is it not the crowning of His sacred head with those very thorns which the sin of the first Adam engendered? is it not the vesting of the King of kings with robes of mockery and derision? And for whom was He thus preparing to die? for whom was He shedding

^k Ps. xxxii. 1, 2.

these prelibations of His most precious blood ? Was it not for the ungodly ? was it not for fornicators ? was it not for adulterers ? was it not for murderers ? was it not for His enemies ? was it not for harlots ? was it not for the self-righteous ? was it not for the blasphemer ?

Yes, it was for all these. Virtue went forth from His wounds, for the pardon and regeneration of all sinners. And that virtue it is which gives power to holy baptism, and to those blessed remedies which are left in charge for those who, though they have defiled their baptismal robes, are brought again to Jesus in penitence, and faith, and love.

Whatever be your doubts, still you know this for certain, that the Son of God has suffered for you. In every faltering of your faith, reassure yourselves with the unanswerable reasoning of St. Paul¹: "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things ?"

When tempted by your ghostly enemy to distrust the assurances of God's willingness to account you righteous, remember that God has already given you a more wondrous gift, and repel the assaults of the tempter in the words of the great Latin Father :—

"Jam quod incredibilis est tenemus, tenemus mortem Christi, tenemus sanguinem Christi^m."

Yea, and to make the triumph of your faith more secure, dwell fondly and reverently upon all the details of those sufferings. Every writhing of that

¹ Rom. viii. 32.

^m August., t. iv. 1676, 1677.

Man of Sorrows in His agonizing pains, every aggravation of contempt cast on Him by His judges and accusers, is most precious as a token to you of His love for sinners.

Follow, with regard to every part of His sacred Passion, the advice which St. Bernard grounded on a passage of the Song of Solomon ⁿ, with regard to our Lord's Body after death :—

"Esto," said he, "Columba in foraminibus petrae, in cavernâ maceriae. Pervola manus, pervola pedes, invola lateri, nihil horum inscrutatum relinquo, singula membra compassionis amaritudine perfundas ^o?"

And so, brethren, beloved in the Lord, shall you find that your sojourn amidst the circumstances of your Saviour's contempt will help you to look on Him as your Saviour, and in full reliance upon His mercies to testify to the Son of Man, "Thou art a place to hide me in, Thou shalt preserve me from trouble: Thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance ^p."

But where and when shall such words find a very special application, and such counsel as St. Bernard's be most serviceable?

To answer this question I must ask another.

Where is the place to which the Son of God invites those who have penitent hearts and a lively faith? where is it that their "bodies are made clean by His Body, and their souls washed through His most precious Blood?" where is it that we are to commemorate the one sacrifice of His death—of

ⁿ Ch. ii. 14.

^o St. Bernard, t. ii. 541 B.

^p Ps. xxxii. 8.

that event in which were finished all His atoning sufferings?

I know of no preparation more quickening to the faith of that man who desires in penitence and love to partake of the benefits of the Lord's Supper, than an endeavour to sympathize with Jesus in His sufferings, and so to bring home to his own cold heart the greatness of that love which made the Son of God first give Himself as a willing sacrifice for the sins of His people, and then feed them on Himself, the Bread of Life, in that most blessed Sacrament of His Body and His Blood.

But sympathy is not the only communion which God wills that we should have with the sufferings of His dear Son.

St. Peter told his brethren, in one of his Epistles ^q, that the fiery trial which awaited them was only a partaking of Christ's sufferings, and St. Paul ^r assured the Romans that suffering with Christ was a token of joint inheritance with Him. And surely, my brethren, it is in no ways strange that they who have touched but the hem of the garment of the Man of Sorrows, as He stood before Pilate and Herod, should receive some drops of blood and suffering from His sacred wounds.

Perhaps some one amongst you has his communion with these sufferings, in such fiery temptations as those with which our blessed Lord was tried in the wilderness.

Others amongst you may feel, in the icy grasp

^q 1 Pet. iv. 12, 13.

^r Rom. viii. 17.

which the world has already begun to fix on your affections, a sure token that you must stir up the gift of God within you, or that the genial glow of the love of Christ will be soon extinguished in your hearts, however young.

In others it may be sickness, or bodily pain, or trials of faith, or contempt and unjust treatment, that may tell you that the Blood of Christ's wounds has reached you, and that you have, by God's grace and providence, an allotted portion in His sorrows.

But if these trials have come from the judgment-hall of Pilate, from that same place too would I draw my first arguments to persuade you how to bear them.

When you are tempted to do evil, meet the temptation with the question to your heart, whether it is prepared to join with Pilate and his soldiers, and to "put your Lord to open shame."

When you are sore let and hindered by the influences of evil men, who, in the ribald spirit of the soldiers, glory in deriding Him who loved them unto death, oppose to their scoffings, to their vile attempts to break down your principles, and to calm all terrors of your conscience, and to dry up all the sources of a loving heart, the image and the high and gentle bearing of the Man of Sorrows. "Consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest ye also be wearied and faint in your minds^a."

Or are you afflicted with pains and infirmities,

^a Heb. xii. 3.

and the trials of weak health? If so, find, I counsel you, your comfort and stay in fixing the eye of your soul on that emaciated body of the Son of Man, and that back which the Son of God had "given to the smiters," and that head which was pierced with many thorns, and say to yourselves with a cheerful heart, "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth[†]."

Or are you not duly esteemed? is your good spoken evil of? Are those who are behind you in grace, and even in what the world values—powers, namely, and attainments of mind, preferred before you? Are you subject to these and such-like disappointments?

Well, to all those who share this not uncommon lot—whose merits are thus, though perhaps acknowledged, yet unrequited, I would say, and this with unfeigned self-abasement, and deep sense of peril, Remember the strong consolation and warning given to us all by our great poet, who, when speaking of the shame and scorn endured by Jesus, adds,—

"As in all lowly hearts, He suffers still,

While we triumphant ride, and have the world at will."[‡]

I will not quote more instances in which we may all have fellowship with our Lord's sufferings. All those "bitter herbs" of sorrow which were planted by the first Adam's sin, when made wet with the life-blood of the second Adam, "turn to sweetness and drop holy balm"—do not prevent our rejoicing in the Lord, and help us to seek from Him the

[†] Heb. xii. 6.

[‡] Christian Year,—Good-Friday.

remedy of all our afflictions. And the same motives may be appealed to in every case, to aid the sufferers to quit them like men. If you take this one view of all these trials—if you look at them all as St. Paul did, as the “marks of the Lord Jesus^x,” then your hearts will be open to every earnest appeal that may be made to them. The very idea that our sufferings can be the *στίγματα* of the Son of God, gives a dignity and a grace to every trial. It enables us to rally every noble, chivalrous feeling on the side of patient continuance in well-doing, the subduing the flesh to the spirit, the bringing into captivity to the law of Christ every imagination of the heart.

Only, dear brethren, master this most quickening thought, carry into your spiritual warfare the inspiring conviction that every temptation and trial is but a *στίγμα*, “a mark” of the Lord your Saviour, and you will never with coward hearts flinch from the struggle, or by a base yielding to unworthy motives compromise the honour of Him who once suffered for you, and now suffers in you.

Yea, more: virtue, as I have already said, has gone out of your Lord’s sufferings, and so you have power to bear them, and even to rejoice in them. “*Suscepit mala nostra, ut tribueret bona sua*”^y:” and so His grace which He has given, and is ever giving to His members, will enable you, if you desire it, to follow His example in suffering, and thus secure to yourselves the blessing St. Paul

^x Gal. vi. 17.

^y Aug., t. v. Append. 268 F.

looked for when he said, "If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him *."

There is, then, nothing wanting to us, either in motive or in power, to practise the lessons we are taught in the courts of Pilate and Herod. But still it is needful for all men that the consideration of this high subject should be constantly pressed upon them. And if all men, if all assemblies of men, are in this condition, I know of none on which I am more bound to press it than on this present congregation.

I see many here who are in the very position which I filled many years ago, and so I know both what are your present exceeding and most special trials, and what, too, are those greater trials on which you will soon be called to enter.

You have, indeed, many temptations not to walk unblameably, not to keep a good conscience, not to cherish those principles you have been taught by father and mother; to think scorn of the restraints imposed on you by those set over you in the Lord, whether here, or at home; not to have a lively fear of the effects which the sins of our youth may have upon our whole after-character and probation; to pamper the body, to indulge in the lusts of the flesh; not to bear yourselves lowly; not to reverence holiness in others; to place the training of your minds before that of your souls; not to try to make your ears quick to hear the voice of Jesus, as He speaks to you in

* 2 Tim. ii. 12.

your daily duties ; not to cherish such sensitiveness of heart as to recognise the touch of your Lord as He would shape your life day by day, and guide you safely through the many dangers that surround you ; not to use with careful love and reverence, to your soul's health, those hallowed offices of our dear mother Church with which you are mercifully provided.

Yes, your very age, and the circumstances of your close association with one another, give, at any rate, a special power to these and such-like temptations. But then I place against all this weight of trial, this heavy, this very heavy pressure of temptation, one single text of God's most holy Word,—“There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able ; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it*.”

And now I would ask any of you, my brethren,—and in asking I should be sure of the answer you would give—who, after hearing such a revelation as this given you by St. Paul, can dare to say that he—he, a member of Christ, a child of God, one to whom all the strength of Christ is pledged by covenant, one who can feed his soul on Christ's Body and Blood, one who knows that the prayer of faith can open wide for him the door of heaven—is not sufficient to master these difficulties ?

At any rate, let him not say at this moment that

* 1 Cor. x. 13.

he knows not of a place of refuge. He has this very night been placed in one. He has been led, as a means of helping him to escape from the power of the world, the flesh, and the devil, into the judgment-hall of Pilate.

And there, my brethren, he and you all may gain what I am sure may soften the heart of stone, strengthen the weak faith, and draw into the safe pastures of the love of Jesus all for whom He died,—sympathy, I mean, with Him as the Man of Sorrows.

This grace of sympathy is, so to speak, the ordained fruit of such communion with Him. And yet you may, I must warn you, be often placed in the presence of the Man of Sorrows, and never gain this grace.

You cannot, indeed, put from yourselves the responsibility of being able to gain it, for your Church will in due season place you again in the midst of the very circumstances in which I have tried to place you to-night; but you may have had to-night, and, you may still have on that future occasion, no eyes to see, no ears to hear, and no heart to feel.

May our Heavenly Father, in His mercy, grant that this may not have been, or ever be, the case with any of you or with me:—

“In tam exuberanti beneficio, in tanto cumulo gratiarum, in quo te largitio divina quasi obruit et confundit, vide ne ingratus sis^b.”

^b St. Bernard, t. ii. 425 E.

But if such sympathizing love is needful for all, what must be the measure of the need in which they will stand of it who shall be called, as may possibly be the case with some of you hereafter, to preach to their fellow-men the doctrine of a suffering God, and to try to fix their hearts on Him?

I am content to leave this question without any answer. And with regard to those greater trials to which I said you will all be exposed, when, after passing out of a state of discipline, you are left to yourselves to guide your own vessel over the rough waves of this world's temptations, I will only add the warning of Jeremiah:—"If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? and if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?"

But there are, not improbably, others also in this congregation about whom I have greater responsibilities than about you, my brethren, whom I have just now addressed. There were, a few years ago, many in this city (some of them are now asleep in their graves, and some of them are still awaiting their summons,) for whom I shall have to give, as having been their parish priest, a strict account hereafter—(God grant that it may also be in mercy!)—and on them, if there be any present, as well as on this whole congregation, I would again press the earnest exhortation of that holy man of God who fifteen years ago warned them, in plain though

° Jer. xii. 5.

gentle terms, of most simple but most heart-stirring eloquence, to avoid the sin of Pilate—his miserable haltings between the clear dictates of conscience and some external demand of interest or fear—and to remember that each one of us has, like him, a season, whether shorter or longer, in which to make our choice, in which either to cherish, and then act upon, any new feelings and new principles God may have pressed upon our hearts, or else first to evade, and then to stifle them.

Such a deepening of holy feeling, such a strengthening of good principles, ought surely to be the result of the special attention which your Bishop has this year drawn in this place to this holy season. My dear brethren, let not this season, I beseech you, so pass away that it may only leave behind it a record of a warning not turned to profit, and of a merciful opportunity of good which bore, alas! no good fruit. If you would sympathize with your Lord, you must obtain of Him this especial power of doing so, this very grace of sympathy; and this you can only do by first asking your God, for His sake who was content to be treated with scorn and derision, to bring your hearts into close communion with Him, the Man of Sorrows; and then, by using in faith and love all the means provided by God for working out His purposes of mercy and loving-kindness towards you.

One counsel I earnestly give to you all, and it is this: whatever amount of this grace God vouchsafes to you in answer to your prayers, use it;

use that one, or those five, or those ten most precious talents, in expressions of sympathy for those on whom any drops from the Saviour's wounds may have fallen. Let all sufferers in this city—the poor, the neglected, the lowly, the sinner, the sick—have reason to know that you are not aliens from fellowship with the Man of Sorrows. And so using the talents already entrusted to you, then day by day pray that this measure of grace may be increased, and that you may employ it, not only on others, but in making your own heart more sensible of its sin, and more alive to the debt of gratitude it owes to the Son of Man; and so shall your coming Easter communion be more joyous and more full of blessing to you than any former one. The present Lent, having been so used as to lead you to look with a more lively and abiding faith to Jesus, shall have thus been the means of clearing the eye of your soul to discern His Body and His Blood; He will Himself have trained you for the more perfect realization of all the truth and grace contained in that great mystery, as by other means, so also by revealing to you, in the courts of Pilate and Herod, the full meaning of those words of prophecy, "I gave My back to the smiters."

3
ON SPIRITUAL BLINDNESS.

A SERMON,

PREACHED IN

THE CHURCH OF ST. MARY-THE-VIRGIN,
OXFORD,

ON WEDNESDAY, MARCH 25, 1857.

BY

CHR. WORDSWORTH, D.D.,

CANON OF WESTMINSTER.



OXFORD,

AND 377, STRAND, LONDON:

JOHN HENRY AND JAMES PARKER.

M DCCC LVII.

A SERMON,

&c.

ON SPIRITUAL BLINDNESS^a.

PSALM xxvii. 1.

“The Lord is my Light.”

It has been frequently said that mankind has emerged from barbarism, and is advancing to a perfect state of civilization. But this opinion seems to be erroneous. Man was originally created in the intellectual likeness of God, and enjoyed intimate communion with the Fountain of Truth. The Fall was the first shock to human intelligence, and even after it the antediluvian races possessed some peculiar facilities—especially in the prolongation of life, and in the possession of a common language—for the successful cultivation of science, and for the exercise of mechanical arts; and these advantages have now been lost to mankind, and will never be recovered in this world.

^a The subject of the Sermon was prescribed by the authority which enjoined its delivery.

Great and manifold, indeed, are the victories which by the goodness of God have been achieved in our own age over the material universe ; and if they are recognised as due to Him, and are consecrated to His glory, and to the advancement of His truth, then they will be ministerial to our spiritual welfare here, and eternal happiness hereafter.

But let it not be forgotten, that here is our discipline and probation. Our intellectual triumphs are our moral trials ; they may be to us means of grace, and they may be occasions of woe.

Let us not disguise from ourselves that they are fraught with spiritual danger. Whenever the human mind is absorbed in tracing link by link the sequence of visible cause and effect—when it moves, as it were, along the rigid groove of mechanical processes and material results, then it is in peril of forfeiting its higher and nobler faculty of appreciating the existence and operation of things invisible. It lives by sight, and not by faith ; it becomes self-confident and vain-glorious, and does not feel its need of strength from above. Prayer, Sacraments, the Word of God, and the other channels and viaducts of spiritual grace to the soul, become to it like colours to the blind, and music to the deaf ; and then its doom is sealed. The Holy Spirit is grieved, and leaves it to itself ; and where the work of the Holy Spirit ends, the victory of the Evil Spirit begins ; he blinds the eyes of the mind, which is not aware of what is going on within. As far as

mere earthly things are concerned, its rational faculties may remain undimmed. It is like some beautiful eye, which to external appearance has no speck or blemish, but has lost the faculty of sight ; it may still display exquisite skill in solving problems of pure or applied science,—it may exhibit a brilliant and inventive ingenuity in mechanical arts,—it may shew great philological research and critical acumen. Clear-sighted as to earthly things, it is spiritually blind ; and blind more hopelessly because unconscious of its blindness, and because it knows not its own need of spiritual light, nor the energy of that power which enthralls it in spiritual darkness.

That there is such a spiritual power which blinds the inner eye, that it is dominant in the world, and aspires to exercise its sway over persons gifted with mental endowments, and that its empire is often most prevalent in an age which enjoys great intellectual advantages, is indeed a mysterious phenomenon ; but it is attested by experience and Holy Scripture, and is a truth which ought to be often inculcated in times like our own, distinguished by mental activity, technical skill, and scientific advancement.

I. Consider, then, some evidence of the energetic operation of this spiritual power, as revealed in Holy Writ.

Among the prophecies of the Old Testament, few are more remarkable for grandeur of conception and

sublimity of expression than that uttered by Balaam, the son of Beor, from the heights of Zophim^b. His prophetic eye saw Christ; he hailed the *Star of Jacob* from afar, and discoursed concerning Him in strains of heavenly beauty^c. As we know also from the Prophet Micah, Balaam had theoretically a clear perception of moral truth as distinguished from its counterfeit; *The Lord hath shewed thee*, he exclaims, *O man, what is good; and what doth He require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God*^d? Besides, he contemplated with serenity the circumstances of Death and Judgment, and with devout aspirations he breathed forth that pious prayer, *Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his*^e. And yet, though he could thus prophesy, preach, and pray, he was in the hands of the Tempter: he endeavoured to reconcile God and mammon, and to make a compromise of his duty to the one with his love for the other; he seeks for indulgences in sin, and glosses it over with a specious disguise, and so deceives himself, and is given over by God to a reprobate mind, and to the fearful penalty of spiritual blindness. This inspired prophet, this eloquent preacher, this framer of holy prayers, becomes a miserable victim and degraded drudge of the devil; he is the prey of the most sordid sin, he *loves the wages of unrighteousness*,

^b Numb. xxiii. 14.

^c Numb. xxiv. 17.

^d Micah vi. 8.

^e Numb. xxiii. 10.

and is consigned to eternal infamy by the Spirit of God in the New Testament^f. With the same lips that had just proclaimed Christ, he could persuade Balak *to cast a stumbling-block before the children of Israel*^g, and with satanic subtlety he could tempt the Israelites, whom he had blessed as God's people, to sin against Him by a double harlotry; and so the prophet and preacher became like an evil spirit, the cause of death to thousands, and fell like a *wandering star, to which is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever*^h.

Contemplate also the case of Saul. How fair and prosperous were his beginnings! But in course of time he disobeys God in the matter of Amalek; he chooses for himself another rule of conduct instead of the Divine willⁱ; he is therefore deserted *by the Spirit of God, and is troubled by an evil spirit*^j, and *receives no answer from Urim or prophets*^k, but resorts to familiar spirits which he himself had banished^l, and dies at length, deserted of God, by his own hand.

But why should we speak of Saul? Even the *man after God's own heart*, the *sweet Psalmist of Israel*, was not secure against the same power; even his heart was darkened for a time by the films of spiritual blindness. In an evil hour he broke

^f 2 Pet. ii. 15, and Jude 11.

^g Rev. ii. 14.

^h Jude 13.

ⁱ 1 Sam. xv. 9—21.

^j 1 Sam. xvi. 14.

^k 1 Sam. xxviii. 6.

^l 1 Sam. xxviii. 9.

God's law by a double sin; he was left for awhile to himself, blinded by the wiles of the Evil one, entranced in a spiritual slumber—a deadly sleep was stealing over his soul. He could pass a whole year in a spiritual dream, walking, as it were, in his sleep; perhaps all the while he went on frequenting the courts of the sanctuary, and joining in its holy service. And even when Nathan the prophet came to him from God, he could listen to that touching apologue, in which his own sins were delineated with exquisite truth and beauty, and could not recognise his own picture in the parable, and denounced judgment on the rich man for comparatively a petty theft; and so he might have continued to sleep on in a deadly swoon, if he had not been aroused from his stupor by a prophetic peal of thunder,—*Thou art the man.*

Yet further: even the wisest of men was a victim of the same delusion. Solomon, the type of Christ, the prince of peace, the builder of the temple, the figure of the Church, he who had evinced his clear perception of the true source of wisdom, by inaugurating his reign with prayer to God for *an understanding heart*^m, he who had received a special revelation of gracious approval from Heaven for this judicious choice, he who was enabled to discourse on physics, ethics, politics, and metaphysics with divine eloquence, he who could pourtray with poetic rapture and prophetic

^m 1 Kings iii. 5.

enthusiasm, in his Song of Songs, the mystical union and marriage betwixt Christ and His Church, he, even he, fell a prey to the Tempter, and his eye was clouded with spiritual blindness; he swerved from the right way, and disobeyed the command of God, and *multiplied wives to himself*, and they *turned away his heart*; and, strange infatuation! he, who had been the wisest of men, erected a shrine for the idolatrous abominations of the Zidonians and the Moabites on the mount of corruption, in the very eye of the holy hill where he had built the temple to Jehovah, which he had dedicated with prayer and sacrifice, and which God had vouchsafed to fill with the visible cloud of His gloryⁿ.

Let us descend to a later time. When Christianity first appeared in the world, literature and the arts flourished, schools of science were full, philosophy, poetry, rhetoric, architecture, sculpture, painting, and music fascinated the world. To the eye of man all was fair. Intelligence seemed to diffuse a genial light, and mankind to be walking in a radiant path of glory; but, in a spiritual sense, its way was overhung with clouds. The heathen world, with its proud science and bewitching sorceries, was like a spiritual Elymas smitten with blindness^o. As the Holy Spirit declares, *Because it glorified not God, it became vain in its imaginations, and its foolish heart was darkened*^p;—*It was alien-*

ⁿ 1 Kings xi. 7; 2 Kings xxiii. 13.

^o Acts xiii. 11.

^p Rom. i. 21.

ated from the life of God through the ignorance that was in it, because of the blindness of its heart^a. The golden age of the intellect was the iron age of the heart.

Even in that country where the people of God dwelt, and where the Sun of Righteousness arose, the powers of darkness held a dominant sway. In the Holy Land, and in the Holy City, the Tempter kept his court, even in the hearts of priests and doctors of the law; he presented himself in its synagogues, and lurked in ambush at its altars. On one side was a spiritual Goshen, on the other a spiritual Egypt; on one side was Christ, the Light of the world, on the other the blind Pharisee. *Thou blind Pharisee*, says the Divine Teacher once and again. *Ye fools and blind; ye blind leaders of the blind*^r! Blind they were, not because they had no intellectual gifts, not because they had no mental attainments. Doubtless, among the Rabbis of the Sanhedrim were many of profound learning, skilled in Masoretic lore, versed in Oriental languages^s, deeply read in the letter of Scripture. Blind they were, not because they had no faith in God, or no knowledge of His will, or no zeal for His glory^t;

^a Ephes. iv. 18.

^r St. Matt. xv. 14; xxiii. 16, 17, 26.

^s Lightfoot in 1 Cor. xiii.

^t See Bp. Butler's remarks on what the *hypocrisy* of the Pharisees really was, in the note to his sermon preached on the 30th Jan. 1740-1. As he well observes, they are called *hypocrites* by our Lord, not on account of insincerity towards *men*, but mainly on account of their insincerity towards God and

no, blind they were, because, while they professed a zeal for God's law, they allowed themselves in the indulgence of certain sins which infringed it; they practised covetousness, rapine, and unholiness^u, and preferred sacrifice to obedience, and *loved the praise of men*, and *sought for honour one of another*, and endeavoured to make accommodations between God and the Evil one, and tampered with their own consciences, and deceived themselves. Therefore they were abandoned by the Holy Spirit, and were beset by the Tempter, and were stricken with spiritual blindness, and could not see the light, although it blazed upon them in noonday splendour from the countenance of Christ.

Yet further. Examine the records of the early Christian Church. What is their evidence? The teaching of false doctrine is a work of spiritual

their own consciences. They were not men who put on the mask of religion only in order to deceive the world. On the contrary, they believed their religion, and were in earnest about it, and were very zealous for it. But their religion, which they believed, and for which they were zealous, was in its nature hypocritical. It allowed them in immoral practices, contrary to the law of God, for which they professed a zeal, and was itself, in some respects, immoral and anti-scriptural, inasmuch as they indulged themselves and others in sin under the notion of zeal for it. See St. Matt. xv. 5 9.

Hence it is that the case of the Pharisees provides a salutary and solemn warning against a common fallacy, viz. that because men are in earnest about their religion, they must be safe guides, whereas, like the Pharisees, they may be *blind leaders of the blind*.

^u St. Matt. xxiii. 13.

darkness. What, then, are the annals of Heresy? They who have gained an unenviable notoriety there, were not men of weak intellects or slender attainments. No; among the most eminent arch-heretics, scarcely one can be named who was not gifted with mental endowments; and many of them were distinguished by attractive graces and winning qualities of life and conversation. The father of heresy, Simon Magus, was a man of great personal influence. He who gave his name to Arianism was distinguished by ready eloquence and logical acumen. The author of Nestorianism was a bishop, celebrated for holiness and erudition. Eutychianism owed its origin to the venerable head of a monastic body. The father of Pelagianism, as his adversaries confess, was remarkable for strictness of life. Socinianism was first propagated by a man of great personal endowments, and of much show of sanctity. *Christ may choose the weak and foolish things of this world to confound the mighty and the wise*^v; *He may commit His Gospel to the advocacy of unlettered Galilæans.* But *Satan* cannot afford to work with such feeble instruments; he tries to gain for himself the choicest flower of this world's wisdom; he endeavours to enlist in his service men distinguished by mental accomplishments, and such as may fascinate the world by charms of bland courtesy and specious refinement. And when he has inveigled them, by tempting them to *choose* for them-

^v 1 Cor. i. 27.

selves some other standard of faith and practice instead of God's law, (and this the essence of heresy²), or to endeavour to reconcile that law by artful shifts and equivocations with the wayward imaginations of their own will, or with the subtle suggestions of their ghostly Enemy, then he holds them fast, spell-bound, unconscious, perhaps even exulting, in the subtle meshes of spiritual blindness, and uses them as his most potent instruments to beguile and enslave others.

And what shall we say of the future ?

The intellect of man will make greater progress, and gain new victories in the material world. The voice of prophecy pre-announces this. *Many will run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased*³. But simultaneously with greater diffusion of human intelligence, there will be a wider spread of spiritual darkness. The reason is, because spiritual *meekness* is the first requisite for the reception of spiritual *light*, and because spiritual *presumption* is the unfailing precursor of spiritual *darkness*: knowledge will be increased, but *knowledge puffeth up*⁴, intellectual conquests too often engender spiritual pride.

The voice of prophecy portends this characteristic of the latter days. The eve of Christ's coming will be marked, like the days of Lot, with great in-

² αἵρεσις, i.e. *choice*, on the part of *man's* will, of something independent of, or at variance with, that law which is prescribed to it by the *will of God*.

³ Dan. xii. 4.

⁴ 1 Cor. viii.

tellectual activity, and secular enterprise, and spiritual blindness^a. *When the Son of Man cometh, shall He find the faith on the earth^b?* There will then be *the great falling away^c*. The Tempter will put forth all his energies, *knowing that he hath but a short time^d*; he will shew himself *with all power, and signs, and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they receive not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them a strong delusion, that they may believe a lie^e*. It will be a time of spiritual midnight, when the cry will be made^f; and the lightning of Christ's presence will flash upon the world.

II. Hence, then, it is clear, that there is such a thing as spiritual blindness, and that it often co-exists with great mental endowments, and with their successful exercise and development in beautiful results, and victorious achievements, in art, literature, and science.

This being so, there is reason to apprehend that the estimates commonly made with regard to human affairs, and to the operation of the human intellect in the province of ethics, politics, and religion, are very superficial and defective; because

^a St. Luke xvii. 28.

^c ἡ ἀποστασία : 2 Thess. ii. 3.

^e 2 Thess. ii. 9—11.

^b St. Luke xviii. 8.

^d Rev. xii. 12.

^f St. Matt. xxv. 6.

they do *not* take into account the existence and energetic working of that invisible spiritual agency which often darkens the heart, not only of individuals, but also of large assemblies and societies of men, and even of nations and Churches—especially when they are least aware of it; and which infallibly will blind them, unless they are on their guard against it.

III. It becomes, therefore, an important enquiry, How may *we* be defended from it?

To answer this question, we must ascertain what is its *cause*? what is the *origin* of spiritual blindness? . . . In one word, it is Disobedience^s.

Disobedience to God's will, however made known to us, whether it be by reason and conscience, the law written in our hearts, or, much more, whether it be disobedience to God's will as expressed in Holy Scripture,—is always punished by Him with spiritual blindness.

This disobedience shews itself in two ways:—

1. By *lusts* of the flesh; such as uncleanness, covetousness, and the like; and

^s As St. Augustine says, (c. Julian. Pelagian. v. 3): "*Cæcitas cordis, quam solus removet Illuminator Deus, et peccatum est, quo in Deum non creditur, et pœna peccati quâ cor superbum dignâ animadversione punitur, et causa peccati cùm mali aliquid cæci cordis errore committitur.*" And in Psalm ii.: "*Ira Dei est mentis obscuratio, quæ consequitur eos, qui legem Dei transgrediuntur.*" And in Psalm ix.: "*Occultum judicium Dei est pœna, quâ, si contempserit homo disciplinam Dei, excæcatur ad damnationem.*"

2. By *intellectual* and *spiritual* sins : such are pride of reason, want of attention to evidence, wilfulness, self-love, self-conceit, self-sufficiency, restless eagerness for self-display, desire of worldly glory and pre-eminence, and to be called of men *Rabbi, Rabbi* ; ambition to be at the head of a religious party ; discontent, disappointment, impatience of neglect, resentment, contempt of others.

This form of disobedience is the most prevalent of the two in an intellectual age like our own ; and it is the most insidious and dangerous, because it does not revolt the minds of others by gross sins, but often captivates them by its alliance with intellectual gifts, and with some moral virtues, and shows of holiness, and semblances of humility.

But it is as hateful in God's sight, and as surely punished with spiritual blindness, as the grossest sins of carnal indulgence.

Here was the cause of the fall of Angels : they disobeyed the law of their being, which was obedience to God. Here was the cause of the blindness of heathenism : *The prince of the power of the air worked in the children of disobedience*^h. Their blindness was the judicial penalty inflicted upon them for turning away their eyes from the true light, which is Godⁱ.

^h Ephes. ii. 2. Cf. Rom. i. 21 ; Ephes. iv. 17.

ⁱ S. Aug. Serm. 117 : "Vindicat Deus in anima aversa a se exordio pœnarum, ipsa cœcitate ; qui enim avertit se a luminibus, jam cœcus efficitur. Nondum sortit pœnam sed jam habet."

Much more, when God has intervened to make a *special* revelation of His will by a *written* law, then He declares, *If they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them*^k.

Here was the cause of the blindness of the Israelites in the wilderness: they would not rejoice in the light which shone from the pillar of fire, but took up the *tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of their god Remphan*^l, whose name is *Blindness*^m.

It is very observable, that when Almighty God would give them a test, by which they might distinguish false teachers, or blind guides, from the true, He supposes it possible that *false* prophets *may work miracles*, and *may deliver prophecies* which may come *true*; and therefore neither prophecies nor miracles are *sufficient* credentials of a Divine mission. But the question to be asked was—and here was the trial of the people's obedience, by which God proved themⁿ,—Does the prophet *teach* anything *contrary* to the *law of God*? If so, he was not to be heard, though he worked miracles and uttered prophecies; no, *that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams*, says God, *shall be put to death, because he hath spoken to turn you away from the Lord your God*^o.

This it is, which has now reduced the Jewish nation to the miserable condition in which they

^k Isa. viii. 20.

^l Acts vii. 43.

^m St. Cyril, on Acts vii. 43.

ⁿ Deut. xiii. 3.

^o Deut. xiii. 5.

are, and have been for eighteen hundred years. They have rejected Him who is the truth, therefore God *hath smitten them with madness and blindness, and they grope at noon-day as the blind gropeth in darkness*^p. They would not behold the light, therefore the sentence has gone forth against them, *Let their eyes be blinded that they see not, and ever bow Thou down their backs*^q.

This, therefore, is clear—that if men will not submit their own will to God's will, if they will not conform their conduct to the right rule of God's law; if they endeavour to distort that law, and wrest it aside to some other rule of their own making; if they try to modify and adjust it to the perverse obliquities of their own carnal appetites, or to the tortuous sinuosities of their own deceitful imaginations; if they substitute in its place the love of glory and worldly popularity; if they think that they may safely follow the *examples*^r of men, however holy they may seem, instead of regulating their lives by the unerring *Word of God*; if they imagine that, provided only they are zealous for *God's glory*, they may be safe without walking in the way of *God's commandments*; if they flatter themselves that, provided their *ends* are good, and their *intentions*^s holy, they need not be very scrupu-

^p Deut. xxviii. 28, 29.

^q Ps. lxix. 24.

^r See Bp. Sanderson's third Lecture on Conscience, vol. iv. p. 44.

^s See Bp. Sanderson's second Lecture on Conscience, vol. iv. p. 22.

lous as to the *means* by which they prosecute their intentions, and seek to attain their ends;—then, alas! they have condemned themselves to moral degeneracy and spiritual degradation; their hearts are no longer fit abodes for the in-dwelling of the Spirit of Truth; He will withdraw His light from them; and if they do not repent, if they are not awakened from their slumber by some prophetic voice,—*Thou art the man*; if they do not examine their own hearts and lives by the standard of God's law, and bring them back from their moral distortions to that straight rule from which they have swerved,—then God will punish them with the fruits of their own defections; He will *choose their delusions*^t, and *their own backslidings shall reprove them*; they will be bound fast *in misery and iron*^u in the hands of the Tempter, and may be immersed for ever in the gloom of spiritual blindness.

IV. Therefore, let this be the fundamental principle of all our systems of Morals and Theology—that God is the only source of light to the soul. *The Lord is my Light*. As in the natural world, it is not so much the *eye* which is the *cause* of vision,—for it cannot see in the dark,—but it is the *sun* in the heavens, which by its luminous beams paints pictures on the retina of the eye; and these pictures are the only means by which the mind is

^t Isa. lvi. 4.

^u Ps. cvii. 10.

enabled to hold converse with the visible world, so it is in the spiritual universe. Christ, *the Sun of Righteousness*, illumines the spiritual iris with His divine rays, which pass through the lens and penetrate the pupil of the inner eye, and delineate beautiful images on the camera obscura of the soul. But unless He does this work, and unless the spiritual organ and optic nerve of the heart is rightly disposed by obedience, and quickened by the Spirit of God, to receive this illumination, all is dark within. Therefore the Psalmist says, *The commandment of the Lord is pure, and giveth light unto the eyes*^x; *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom*^y; *The secret of the Lord is among them that fear Him*^z; *Thy word is a lantern unto my feet, and a light unto my paths*^a; *When Thy word goeth forth, it giveth light and understanding unto the simple*^b. And therefore his prayer is, *Open Thou mine eyes, that I may see the wondrous things of Thy law*^c. And this spiritual illumination is vouchsafed only to those who obey God; and therefore Christ, who is the Light of the world, declares, *If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine*^d.

If this light is not vouchsafed, spiritual darkness prevails. The inner eye is blinded by the

^x Ps. xix. 8.

^y Ps. xxv. 13.

^z Ps. cxix. 130; Prov. vi. 23.

^a St. John vii. 17.

^y Ps. cxi. 10.

^a Ps. cxix. 103.

^c Ps. cxix. 18.

Evil one, it cannot see the things of the Spirit, which *are spiritually discerned*^e.

Here is the explanation of the mystery which we have been contemplating in the histories of Balaam, of Saul, of David, of Solomon, of the Pharisees. Their blindness was their punishment, for closing their eyes to the blessed light of God's Law; and the restoration of David's spiritual sight was due, under Divine grace, to his humble recognition of his own spiritual blindness^f, and to his penitential acknowledgment of his deviation from that rule, and to his earnest prayer for illumination, that God would make him *a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within him*^g.

V. Let us now apply these principles to ourselves. We may here see a solution of difficulties which might otherwise perplex us, in the circumstances of our own age.

It is a painful characteristic of the present times, that they abound with examples of persons whose mental endowments we admire, and who have abandoned those principles of spiritual truth which we have been taught to revere, and have espoused others of a very different character. We are therefore constrained to ask, Can that system be true,

^e 1 Cor. ii. 14.

^f As St. Augustine says, in Ps. xcvi., *Qui sibi videre videntur, cæci fiunt; qui cæcitatem confitentur, illuminari merentur.*

^g Ps. li. 10.

which such men have discarded as false? and can those principles be false, which such men have adopted as true?

Here, surely, is a question that demands our earnest attention. Let us apply to it the considerations that have now been stated in this discourse.

1. To mention one form of desertion which forces itself on our notice here.

If the persons that have gone forth from us have *gained*, by their transition, a greater love for God's Law, especially as revealed in His written Word; if in their practice they have become brighter examples than before, of dutiful obedience to that Law and Word; if in their present teaching they inculcate greater reverence to that Law, and display a clearer knowledge of that Word; if they now endeavour, with greater earnestness and zeal than before, to bring the faith and practice of others to a nearer conformity to that Law and Word; if they dwell mainly on *the weightier matters* of that Law, — *judgment, mercy, and faith*^h; if they love Holy Scripture more, and teach others to understand it better; then their present condition is one of more spiritual light; and we, my beloved brethren, might well wish it were ours.

But, on the other hand, if they have adopted a system which does not regulate itself by God's Law, but seems to shrink from the light beaming from

^h St. Matt. xxiii. 23; St. Luke xi. 42.

God's written Word; and which appears to make its own aggrandizement its rule of right, and seeks to justify means confessedly bad by ends equivocally good; if they have left a Church which reads daily God's holy Word as her rule of faith, and have passed to a Church which feeds her people, not so much with the Bread of Life as with the husks of doubtful dogmas and legendary fables,—then, let them be eloquent men, let them be learned men, they are not more eloquent than Balaam, and they are not wiser than Solomon, who were not saved by their eloquence and wisdom from sinking into the lowest gulph of spiritual blindness; and unless they are awakened (which may God of His mercy grant!) from the spiritual delirium in which they are entranced, their names will go to swell the long and melancholy catalogue, reaching from the fall of angels even to the present hour, of beings endued by God with brilliant intellectual gifts, and yet clouded and overshadowed by dense spiritual darkness.

Here is the trial of our steadfastness. When, in the Christian army, the heart of *the standard-bearers fainteth*¹, then it is, that the courage of the Christian soldier is proved; then it is best seen whether he putteth his trust in man, or cleaveth to the Lord his God.

Here we may enlarge our view.

The Church of Rome has great intellectual

¹ Isa. x. 18.

gifts; and when we contemplate the amplitude of her sway, the continuance of her dominion, and the confidence of her attitude, we may feel inclined to doubt the soundness of our own religious position. But when we scrutinize her doctrines, and examine her practice,—when we find, for instance, that the city of Rome, which boasts to be the Mother of Churches, has never since the invention of printing down to the present hour—a period of near four centuries—put forth a single copy of the original Scriptures; when we observe that even now she is propounding to her people new articles of faith and new objects of devotion, and is thus by a process of reaction revolting the heart of Europe from Christianity, and goading it on to unbelief, and is heaping up the combustible elements of a social volcano, which, if we read the future aright, will ere long burst forth from its crater, and deluge the world with a flood of fire,—then we pause with mysterious awe, and recognize here the work of the Evil one, who can blind the eyes of Churches in a spiritual eclipse, and is never more to be feared than when he appears *as an angel of light*¹.

2. Yet again. Systems of Education are propounded which aim mainly to stimulate the intellect, and award all their distinctions to mental endowments alone. And it is fondly hoped by many that such systems as these will inaugurate a golden age, and regenerate mankind.

¹ 2 Cor. xi. 14.

Here also, at first, there is much to enchant ; and we are tempted to share in the hopes of those who have drawn these fair ideal pictures of Utopian felicity. But when we scan these systems, and find that the Word of God is not their rule, and that the grace of God is not their moving principle, and that the glory of God is not their aim and end, then we revise our estimate ; and we are sure that such systems as these will be powerful instruments in the hand of the Evil one, to harden the heart and blind the eyes of a nation, and to make it more callous to good, and more energetic for evil ; and instead of consolidating its institutions and renovating society, they will disorganize its frame, and involve it in misery and ruin.

3. Once more. When we look at what is most dear to us, as the foundation of our peace on earth, and of all our hopes for eternity ; when we behold the Holy Scriptures themselves handled, as they often are in the present age, with familiar irreverence, and treated as a common book ; when we see their genuineness questioned, and their authenticity impugned ; when we hear them taxed with blemishes and imperfections, inaccuracies and discrepancies ; and when we behold this work of scriptural decomposition prosecuted with philosophic calmness or confident eagerness, by persons in high repute for intellectual gifts,—we feel the foundations of our faith trembling beneath our feet, we begin to disbelieve our own stability, and a

doubt steals over us whether we have *not followed cunningly devised fables*^k, and whether Christianity itself may not be a beautiful dream.

But when we reflect that the Scriptures themselves declare, that the *Lord is our Light*, that He is the *Father of lights*, from whom *cometh every good gift*^l, and that *in His light alone can we see light*^m; when we remember that *mysteries are revealed to the meek*ⁿ, and that *them who are meek He shall guide in judgment*, and *such as are gentle, them shall He learn His way*^o; and that in order to be a good Expositor of Scripture, it is not enough to be a learned linguist, a careful collator of manuscripts, and to be well versed in history, chronology, and geography; but that all these gifts are merely like *sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal*, unless they are sanctified by the Holy Ghost; and that the Word of God cannot be understood without the *unction of the Spirit*^p who wrote it, and that we must become like *little children* in order to receive Christ, and that *God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace unto the humble*^q, and that all mental endowments are of no avail for the reception of divine truth, without dutiful obedience, but rather are a snare to those who have them; and that men *pro-*

^k 2 Pet. i. 16.

^l Jas. i. 17.

^m Ps. xxxvi. 9. St. Irenæus, vi. 13: "Nemo potest Deum scire, nisi a Deo doceatur."

ⁿ Eccles. iii. 19.

^o Ps. xxv. 8.

^p 1 John ii. 20, 27.

^q Jas. iv. 6; 1 Pet. v. 5.

fessing themselves wise, become fools^r, and that *their wisdom and knowledge pervert them*^s, and that God *turneth wise men backward, and maketh diviners mad*^t, and that *none of the wicked shall understand*^u; and when we find that those persons who cavil at Scripture have *not* the gift of *humility*, and are disqualified by presumption and arrogance for understanding and interpreting Scripture; then we are sure that in following them we should be led by *blind guides*; and therefore their scepticism, so far from shaking our faith in Scripture, confirms and settles it. For it shews us that the prophecies of Scripture are true, that *some of understanding should fall*, to try the faith of the world^x; and that *scoffers should arise in the last days*^y; and that Scripture has rightly warned us, that there is such a thing as spiritual blindness; and that it may co-exist with great intellectual gifts, and that they may be mis-used by man against the Giver Himself.

VI. Finally, dearly beloved, let us hold fast what we possess. As this festal anniversary^z reminds us, the health of our inner life is in dutiful obedience to God.

The humility of the Blessed Virgin Mother, whose name is associated with this Day and with this Church, is a beautiful pattern to the Christian

^r Rom. i. 22.

^s Isa. xlvii. 10.

^t Isa. xlv. 25.

^u Dan. xii. 10.

^x Dan. xi. 35.

^y 2 Pet. iii. 3.

^z The Annunciation.

soul, which receives Christ within it by the embraces of faith and love. *Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it unto me according to thy word^a.* Let this be the language of our hearts ; let us all pray for the gift of the Holy Ghost to bring our will into conformity to God's will, and to cleanse us from all evil, that so we may understand His Word. *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God^b.* The holy Evangelist St. John, who had the heart of the dove, had also the glance of the eagle ; he who lay in the bosom of Christ, and drank wisdom from His mouth, he saw the apocalypse, he was St. John the divine.

This spirit of holy love, and devout self-sacrifice, and dutiful obedience, is the very life of Angels, and enables them to behold the face of God in heaven^c. This it was which lit up the countenance of the first martyr, St. Stephen, and made it appear as the face of an angel^d. This it was which, by the Holy Ghost, enabled him to pierce through the clouds, and see *the heavens opened, and the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God^e.* This it is, which even now lights up the features of holy men on earth in their dying hour, and illumines their inner eye, and gives them a glimpse and foretaste of the beatific vision of heaven.

Therefore, my younger hearers, let this be your

^a St. Luke i. 38. ^b St. Matt. v. 8. ^c St. Matt. xviii. 10.

^d Acts vi. 15.

^e Acts vii. 56.

moving principle in all your studies here,—*The Lord is my Light.*

You cannot indeed afford to neglect any intellectual gift, or to dispense with any instrument of mental cultivation. All these are sacred trusts from God, and He will require an account of them from you at the great day. Our forefathers wisely built the study of sacred truth on the solid foundation of classical learning, philological discipline, logical reasoning, and mathematical science. Hence our schools of the prophets have sent forth a Hooker, and an Andrewes, a Sanderson, a Barrow, and a Pearson; hence they have been the bulwarks of Christianity in our favoured land. Remember your own intellectual ancestry, strengthen their ancient foundations. You have great need of them, and they have great need of you. If there ever was a time when England required a learned clergy and intelligent laity, it is now. We are beleaguered by enemies, powerful, vigilant, active; the Evil one is arming human reason against divine revelation, and is enlisting the intellectual faculties of man in an impious conscription against the Word of God.

Cultivate, then, with reverent care your mental faculties, and improve your present opportunities, as precious gifts from God; but never forget, that they are nothing worth, unless your hearts are illumined by Him. “He clarifies the understanding

by the purification of the heart'. Happily and wisely, the two intellectual eyes of England—our famous, ancient Universities—have recognised this high and holy principle, and have displayed it as the heraldic badge and cognizance on their academic escutcheons :—*Dominus Illuminatio mea* : “The Lord is my Light.” *Hinc Lucem et Pocula sacra* : “The light of truth and the waters of life flow in the same stream.” Thus we are reminded that our true light—our spiritual Urim and Thummim—is in the countenance of God.

They teach us also to seek for that light, not by proud disputations, but by lowly reverence on our knees. They teach us to seek for it in the daily orisons of our college chapels ; they teach us to seek for it by beginning our academic terms with the reception of the holy Eucharist ; whereby we endeavour to dispel the films of our spiritual vision, and to *have our eyes opened*, and to discern Christ *made known* to us, as He was to the two disciples at Emmaus, *in the breaking of bread* ^g.

Thus we learn to converse more and more with the invisible world, and derive spiritual strength and courage from communion with it. Even here upon earth, like the young man of Elisha, we be-

^f See Bp. Taylor's sermon, *Via Intelligentiæ*, on John vii. 17, preached by him as Vice-Chancellor to the University of Dublin. Lond. 1678, p. 86.

^g St. Luke xxiv. 31, 35.

hold the mountain of the Lord full of horses and chariots of fire around us^h, and they bear us in spirit to heaven.

May the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, give unto us all the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him: the eyes of our understanding being enlightened; that we may know what is the hope of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power, which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to comeⁱ. AMEN.

^h 2 Kings vi. 17.

ⁱ Ephes. i. 17—21.



OUR LORD'S AGONY.

A SERMON,

PREACHED IN

THE CHURCH OF ST. MARY-THE-VIRGIN,

OXFORD,

ON

FRIDAY, MARCH 27, 1857.

BY

THOMAS THELLUSSON CARTER, M.A.,

RECTOR OF CLEWER, BERKS.

OXFORD,

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JOHN HENRY AND JAMES PARKER.

M DCCCLVII.



A SERMON,

&c.

ST. LUKE xxii. 44.

“ And being in an agony He prayed more earnestly : and His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.”

It has been supposed that the Incarnation was irrespective of the Fall ; that it was the original design of God to raise humanity, if it had not fallen, by incorporating it into Himself ; and that the Fall only made *this* difference :—that the Incarnation was accompanied with suffering and death, whereas without the Fall there would have been no suffering and no death. The same vast gulf between the Godhead and the creature would in either case have been crossed, but that in passing the gulf God involved Himself in suffering, was caused by sin.

Whether this be the truth or no, we have no clear revelation ; nor would I now pause on the enquiry. But it is highly important that in our minds at least we should distinguish two mysteries which are combined together, but which are distinct in themselves :—(1.) The uniting of the two discordant

natures in an indissoluble communion, and, (2.) The coming of the Divine nature into contact with pain and death. Suffering was not the necessary consequence of the Incarnation, but the result of a further love ; a mystery within a mystery ; a most amazing addition to what was without it an unspeakable instance of Divine compassion.

The Humanity of the Son of God, simply considered, is not the subject of our thoughts this evening, but His *suffering* Humanity ; the Incarnation viewed under the added mystery of distress and agony. There were two distinct causes giving occasion to the sufferings of Christ : one was the necessity of atonement ; the other the perfecting of our human nature. Atonement in itself implies suffering and death, for these were the penalties of sin, and to atone for sin is to remove its penalties by a vicarious endurance of them. The other cause is not at once so manifest ; to understand it we must take into account a vital law which regulates all human life. When St. Paul says that Christ “ learned obedience by the things which He suffered, and being made perfect, He became the Author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him^a,” let it not be supposed that this is any disparagement of the dignity of His Person or the holiness of His nature. It rather proves the truth of the Incarnation ; for to *learn* obedience, to advance in increasing likeness to God, to become more and

^a Heb. v. 8, 9.

more perfect, is the only condition of humanity of which we have any idea ; and if this same law did not regulate the Incarnation of Christ, He took some other form of humanity, not ours. Now this learning, this continual advance, this drawing upwards of our nature, step by step, to a higher sphere of being, is wrought out by discipline and the experience of suffering. This principle explains the difference between the innocence of regenerated infancy, and the tried virtue of the long-suffering Saint. It was, therefore, no more disparagement that Christ advanced our nature in Himself by such means, than it was a disparagement to His Humanity that He felt hunger, or shed tears, or that His feet moved from place to place in lapse of time. The necessity of atonement, and this law of the perfecting of our nature, were the two causes of the sufferings of Christ.

Again, in viewing the Passion of the Son of God, we may view either His earthly life as a whole, or some of its special details. Viewing His earthly life as a whole, we see a state of prolonged, continuous suffering. For, not to speak of daily specific trials, the mere fact of touching at every point a sinful nature, though Himself sinless ; the being subject to the laws of a fallen world, though it was at His own will ; the feeling at every pore the atmosphere of sin around Him, the sound, the look, the breath, even of infirmity,—how much more of pollution, which compasseth man about as with a garment,—

must have been an unknown pain thrilling keenly throughout His entire earthly existence.

If we view the special details of His suffering, there were three occasions on which the flood of sorrow rose to its height. These three occasions are the Hunger and Temptation in the wilderness, the Agony of Gethsemane, and the Crucifixion. When we draw near these three most awful scenes of suffering, and compare them one with the other, we discern differences; and one difference I would point out, which distinguishes the Agony by its excess of anguish from the other two. In the Fasting of the wilderness there was the wasting of all the powers of the body, an exhaustion of the frame to the lowest point of depression, followed by the hunger and the personal contest with Satan, but all passed in perfect stillness; there was throughout an entire calm. In the Crucifixion, again, there was the yielding up of the whole frame, the whole heart, to suffering; but what signally marks the Crucifixion, is the silent endurance of the dreadfulness of those ghastly wounds.

It was not so in the Agony. There was a convulsion of the whole being of His Manhood, such as the world never saw. It seemed as if the depths of His humanity were broken up, the course of nature violently driven back to its source. The convulsion proceeded from within. It was the *Soul* which became "exceeding sorrowful, even unto death." It was the suffering which was going on

within, which expressed itself in the words—"Father, if it be possible, let this *cup* pass from Me ; nevertheless, not My will, but Thine be done." It was in this inward upheaving of the depth of the hidden life that the Agony began, and it was only as the consequence of this, that the external frame was so awfully prostrated, and He "fell on His face, and prayed, and being in an agony, He prayed more earnestly, and His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground."

How are we to interpret such a scene as this ? The interpretation of the Agony is to be sought in the two causes already pointed out, which made the Incarnation to be such a mystery of woe. (1.) The Agony was a vital part of the Atonement. What had been set forth in type, age after age, along thousands of years, in the case of every transgression, when the sinner, bringing the victim to the altar, laid his hand on the victim's head, confessing over it his sins, thus transferring the burden of his transgression from himself to the victim ; after which the victim, now laden with a curse, was led forth to die,—this was a dim figure of what fell on our Lord in the garden of Gethsemane. God was laying on Him the iniquity of us all, before He was crucified. The cup which it was such an intense effort to drink was the accumulated guilt of the world. The consciousness of the sin of mankind fell on Him in that hour, and it convulsed the Heart which had embraced that world in its untold

depths of love. The curse was laid on the Victim's head, before the Victim was offered in death.

(2.) The second cause of the Agony was the necessity of perfecting our nature. The burden most alien to His pure Humanity was then consciously taken upon His Soul. In fully consenting to the cup of the wrath of God, and the imputed sin of mankind, He was submitting the nature He would redeem to a deeper humiliation than had hitherto been reached ; teaching it a more complete obedience to the Divine will ; enduing it with the capacities of a higher endurance, than had yet been exhibited ; removing from it its last shrinking infirmity ; impressing on every affection of the sensitive human heart the image of Divine love in a more entire self-sacrifice.

Let us turn now to consider the practical bearing of this awful subject, and with the aid of His good Spirit seek to draw from it some lessons for our own learning.

When St. Paul says, " It became Him for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of our salvation perfect through sufferings^b," it is manifest that he is declaring an universal law ; that he is revealing a connection which must exist between Christ and all His members ; that they are to become perfect in the same way, according to the same principle of life ; that they are to be united not merely with His Humanity, but with His suffer-

^b Heb. ii. 10.

ing Humanity. Couple with this another remarkable passage in the same Epistle,—“Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.” And then, arguing still from the necessity of submitting to the discipline of earthly parents: “Shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but He for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness^c.” Do not these words force on us the same conclusion, that the discipline of pain is ours as well as His; that suffering is a sacrament of which all must partake, varying in its outward form, but working the same inward grace; that this inward grace is the purification, the perfecting of our nature; that every one of us must pass under the shadow of His Agony, in order that not our will, but His will be done in us? There is in both these texts a universality; no limit, no exception; they speak not of the mode, but they speak of the necessary law, under which redeemed humanity is being formed, that it may again serve God. They at once explain the mystery of the Agony, and they unfold the practical lessons which it involves. We

^c Heb. xii. 6—10.

have been contemplating in Christ a spectacle of unutterable love, of supernatural endurance, and behold it is a parable which has its moral in ourselves. We thought to have entered a cloud of mystery, at which we should be awed and moved to tears ; but lo ! the Sufferer turns to us and says, that what is wrought out in His Person, is to have its counterpart in our own. We came thinking to meditate for an hour on an object of faith beyond the possible reach of our own experience, and we are bidden not to depart till the impression of that agonized Form has been stamped upon our own spiritual life. We thought to have stood by, and admired some marvellous picture ; we look closer, and we see it to be a model which is enclosing us around to mould us after the same image.

Let us, then, enquire how this is practically to be realized. I must refer you again to the two principles in which we read the interpretation of our Lord's Agony,—the necessity of atonement, and the perfecting of our nature. In the depths of those two principles lie the sources of all that discipline and chastisement of which the children of God are partakers. (1.) It is not to be supposed that we can atone for a single sin ; that any suffering of ours can have the effect of blotting out the penalty of any one offence. An infinite God, and an all-perfect law, cannot be atoned by the imperfect act of a finite creature. But is it therefore to be supposed that none of the penalties of sin reach the

sinner? What then is the meaning of such palpable signs as broken health the fruit of youthful intemperance; or shattered fortunes following early improvidence; or the pains of inward remorse at some irremediable evil; or the sense of sorrow caused another whom we love, reacting on oneself, and clouding all our days? Or, taking the broadest view, what is the meaning of man's toil, or woman's pang in childbirth, or the death of those we love? Are they not the penalties of the primæval sin? And though they have, thanks be to God, their side of mercy, all working together for good to them that love God, yet have they, on that account, lost their aspect, their keen edge of agony? "Nathan said unto David, The Lord also hath put away thy sin: thou shalt not die. Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die." In these few words we may read the doom of the world. Another has atoned for thy sin. It is put away. Thou shalt not die. Howbeit, thou must suffer loss. Thou must enter into the shadow of the death which has fallen on another. The agony of death is still lying on the world, though it is no longer eternal and has become the gate of everlasting life.

(2.) The same connexion is seen, if we consider the other cause of the Agony. How but by effort and by conquest does man work out his destiny?

Where is the exemption to any man, if he would overcome his sin, from self-denial and an inward struggle? How can we gain one step in the attainment of sanctity without endurance? Where is the precious gift of a pure body and a chaste heart, without mortified senses? Where is found subjection to the will of God, and there is not found also pain and wounding of the heart? Who can say that he has submitted himself to the law of truth and love, without self-sacrifice? And what self-sacrifice is it that costs us nothing? Or, if there be choice spirits who have kept the garments of their regeneration unspotted by the flesh, unruffled by any sharp struggle within, has it not been because theirs was a life-long discipline, which has been spared its keenness, only because it was unceasing, and because their lowly nature yielded itself readily to the voice of warning?

Here, then, we read the interpretation of the mystery in which our probation is accomplished, and they are the very same principles which explained the mystery of our Lord's Agony. Let us look closer, and see how these things bear on our actual experience.

And first, consider how the Agony of Christ has become the ground of consolations in sorrow or trial. There has been a change in the sympathies of heaven. What the Son of God endured in the hour of His Agony, He hath borne with Him into the heavens. His personal experience of suffering

has passed into the depths of the Divine compassion, and become part of it. God has not only taken into Himself the nature of man, He has taken into Himself the consciousness of the wounds which He received in that nature. The sympathy of God for human suffering is the result of the experience obtained through the inward trials of His own sensitive nature. "In all things it behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High-Priest; . . . for in that He Himself suffered, being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted. . . . For we have not an High-Priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin^d." And now there is no part in which man's manifold mystery of life is tried, which does not find sympathy in the personal experience which Christ has had, and which has become part of His being. Every human sufferer may draw near to God, through the nature which was convulsed in Gethsemane, and find in that Heart, a response which can understand and feel what he is enduring, what his struggle costs him. Each one's sorrow is a wave in that deep sea of sorrows, in which God Himself once lay prostrate. It still finds its response in Him who "knows no variableness, nor shadow of turning."

Is there, then, any sorrower here? Is there one with a lonely heart? Is there one struggling

^d Heb. ii. 17, 18; iv. 15.

against the force of his will to do the will of God? Is there one prostrate in spirit? Is there a wound so fresh, so sore, as not yet to bear the touch of human sympathy? Such an one, then, can feel the blessed consolation which flows from the Agony of God; can kneel with Him Who was prostrate beneath the olive-trees; can feel the power of a sympathy which has no utterance, and can hear God in His sorrows speaking with the voice of a man to man's heart.

2. But there is a lesson to be here learnt, still more deeply concerning our souls than consolation and sympathy. It will be remembered what was said of the perfecting of our nature wrought out by suffering. In the prayer of the night of His Agony,—“If it be possible let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what Thou wilt,”—there are depths out of which all the children of God may draw, according to their own measure, the secret of their own weakness and their own strength, and the awful issue which, in the conflict of human life, is at stake. Those prayers were the expression of the highest instance of a law of suffering and of conquest to which we all, in our several degrees, are subject. It was the bringing the human will into a perfect accord with the will Divine. And this is the interpretation of the struggles of every human heart in its several degrees. It is a struggle of our own will against the will of God. There is this difference between Christ and

His members. In Him there was never any variance between the Human and the Divine will, but only His human will gradually advanced to its final, perfect conformity with His own Divine will. In us the will is not only imperfect, it is at enmity. In Him the human will only needed the fulness of union where it had always been united ; in us it needs first to be brought into union, and then to be made perfect. And this is effected in our case, as in His, by discipline and inward trial.

There are two kinds of spiritual discipline. There is a discipline without us, and there is a discipline arising from within ; there is what God lays on us in His providences, and there is what every man lays on himself. The discipline which arises from without is manifest,—a parent's control, the “being under tutors and governors till the time appointed by the father,” the necessity of labour, restraints of a narrow fortune, a lowly lot, sickness, bodily pain, disappointments, the world's rough usage, partings, losses, death of loved ones, the burden of many infirmities and manifold temptations,—these combine to form the external discipline through which God is ever acting on the soul, and at once searching and forming the life. These we must needs be subject to ; they fall on the evil and the good alike.

Again, there is a discipline arising from within, which a man lays on himself ; abstinence ; self-denial in lawful indulgence ; giving up friends, amuse-

ments, social ease, which have been found dangerous to the soul : restraining the eyes, the taste, the touch, enuring the body to cold, to hunger ; early rising ; rising at dead of night to pray ; rules of prayer ; rules of work ; austerities to subdue the flesh ; secret wrestlings with imaginations and visions of evil : these are instances of the discipline which is inward, which is voluntary, which a resolute will creates for itself.

And shall we say that the involuntary discipline of God is necessary, but that the voluntary discipline of man is not necessary ? Why, then, did our Lord say, "this kind" of evil spirits "goeth not out but by prayer and fasting?" Why does St. Paul, in his enumeration of his own forms of chastisement, couple together "weariness and painfulness, watchings often, hunger and thirst, fastings often, cold and nakedness," and "the care of all the Churches?" Here we have what is involuntary side by side with what is wholly voluntary. Why did he say that he had "to keep under his body, and bring it into subjection," lest he "become a cast-away," unless it were that self-imposed bodily austerities were essential to an Apostle's safety ? Why does he proclaim to the Church his praise of some Corinthians who had sinned, "what carefulness it wrought in you ; yea, what clearing of yourselves ; yea, what indignation ; yea, what fear ; yea, what vehement desire ; yea, what zeal ; yea, what revenge?" Why hold up this self-discipline of penitents to the

admiration of the world, unless it be that sin now can be cleared away only as it was cleared away then, and that the flesh needs still the same discipline as of old?

And here let me point out to you a momentous difference, which is observable at different periods of man's life. As life advances, the involuntary discipline of God increases; as we grow older, we become more exposed to the shafts of the world's trials. We have more at stake. We make our home; objects of our love gather around us. We have multiplied our places of attack. We can be wounded at a greater number of points. And this, too, when our spirits are become more tender, our frame less elastic; when life's freshness, and so life's hopefulness, is wearing away; when the world's harder and colder features come more out to view, and we become more lonely, as we draw within the advancing shadows of the evening of our days. Often, as men grow old, they need not the voluntary discipline of the Cross; the involuntary is doing all the work. The "hand of God has touched" them, and it is enough.

It is not so in youth. If we omit the restraints of parents or guardians, which are in truth bonds of love, not chains of discipline, there are seldom any trials deserving of the name. All life is so fresh, so bright, so exciting; the spirits so buoyant; loss or death are scarcely understood; no sorrow reaches the inner life; labour knows no weariness;

pleasure as yet cloy not. What multitudes are there of the young who, by God's goodness, have nothing to bruise their spirit, everything to excite it ; nothing to wean them from the world, everything to win them to it ! Here, then, comes the momentous truth,—if we would serve God in youth, and overcome passion, and check the craving of desire, it must be by voluntary discipline, by internal effort. It must arise from within the man himself. He must himself take the scourge ; himself place his neck beneath the yoke. He must anticipate the chastisements which will certainly find out the penitent in later life. Most often the youth who has sinned sees at first some one sin only in his life,—of carnal appetite, it may be ; it is the first idea of sin he has. The consciousness of the sin may have been brought home to him by the slightest cause—the fear of a mother's sorrow, a sister's look, a sentence in a book, a friend's half-heedless remark, a chance hindrance in some design ; but it may be the crisis of an entire, immortal life. Will he abstain, or will he go on ? Will he make a covenant with his eyes, or will he still indulge them ? Will he chasten himself by a secret abstinence, or does he shrink from the touch of austerity ? Will he open his heart, and seek some remedy, and ask to be absolved and to be guided ? or will he conceal his shame, and cast aside the proffered office of a discipline of love, and, closing his eyes to the tremendous conse-

quences, give the reins to a continually increasing passion? The answer is the turning-point, perhaps, of an endless course. How many are there who have started fair in life, buoyant and joyous, like a ship in full sail parting from the roadstead on a summer's day, and passing gaily out of sight are heard of no more, till the tale is told of a storm met out at sea, and a wreck! How many penitents in after-life have mourned, are mourning, the ravages within their souls which would have been spared by a stricter rule, kept in early days, when rule is most easily formed, because the life is most pliant to the touch! And what must be the end of youth which is unsubmissive to external discipline, or without effort of inward restraint, but years of the stern sorrows of the realities of life, if not a portion of the irremediable agony that stretches out endlessly "where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched?"

We have seen how, in the depth of the Agony of God, sorrow finds its consolation, and self-discipline its model and encouragement. We may read one more practical truth, as to the assistance it gives to the soul which is really chastening itself before God. We need all helps in a course of self-chastisement. We cannot afford to lose any; least of all can we safely overlook the one which is here offered to us in this scene of our Lord's Agony. Why, we may ask, why was the secret of His deep suffering divulged? Why such a scene as this? His fainting,

His "strong crying and tears," His intense prayer, His desolation, His prostration on the ground, His falling on His face, His convulsion, His Sweat of blood in the dead of night, with only one good angel to behold? Why reveal all this to the world? Our Lord's devotions were retired devotions. He was not wont to seek the notice of men in His private sorrows, His secret communions with the Father. It would seem not to have been necessary for the Atonement. The Atonement might have been published without the knowledge of all the humiliation and anguish which it caused; or at least the Crucifixion alone might have been exhibited before the world; but why all that secretly preceded it? May we not draw *this* conclusion, that one object of this disclosure was that we might contemplate Him, and, through the contemplation, receive the impression of His sorrows, as one great means of endurance, of purification, and conformity with God? It is a law of our being that objects without act on the soul within, and transform the soul into their own nature. How do the images of sin coming from without through the eyes, the ears, the touch, penetrate the soul! Does not the soul feed on the image, and sin in secret, if it cannot sin openly; sin in imagination, if it cannot in act; committing adultery in the heart, when the outward contact is forbidden? It is a law of our nature. Where, then, is the remedy to meet this case? It is by turning the same law to be a help instead of

a hindrance, a blessing instead of a curse. If the image of Jesus crucified is to be impressed on our soul's life, it must be by the grace of God acting through this law of our nature. As images of sin incline to sin, and images of suffering incline to sympathy, so images of sanctity incline to sanctity. As the senses drink into the soul the false beauty, the ensnaring sweetness, of forbidden love, so the eyes may drink into the soul a purer beauty, and a truer sweetness, and the exalting greatness of the vision of eternal things. We need contemplation, and we need it as a habit. Can occasional meditation counteract a perpetual influence? Yet the world, and its objects of covetousness, of lust, of ambition, are acting on our sensitive nature by a perpetual influence. They are around us as the air we breathe. Nor can a mere negative course suffice. Can you, by closing the eye or the ear, exclude the images that throng around you? They root themselves in the mind itself, and live by a new life in the world of the imagination. And the imagination creates out of the forms which it has imbibed new forms of sin, multiplying its objects and its varieties of indulgence, and the inner man makes himself the imaginary hero of imaginary scenes of sin, the imaginary voluptuary of an ideal feast. How do these images of evil, by a mysterious law, linger in the memory years after the object has been seen, as the retina of the eye retains the forms and colours of visible scenes when

the outer sense has been closed or the object is removed. Can, then, a mere struggle to exclude the objects of temptation succeed? The soul cannot remain empty; it cannot cease to think; it will create its own world of temptation. How then can we succeed, but by substituting a new world within, by impressing on the soul the objects of a higher life in the place of the false visions which possessed it; displacing the abundance of the thronging thoughts of our fallen creation by the abundance of the fulness of the visions which have been created around us, by the love of God, within the Catholic world, which has embraced all that is pure, and lovely, and of good report in this life, and all that is glorious, and saintly, and majestic in the life which is eternal? We may believe that the Angels sustain their sanctity by feeding on the Face of God. They lead contemplative lives; they mingle the contemplative with the active life. They are continually more and more filled with God, because they more and more behold God. We read that even in their ministrations of love on earth, they never take their eyes off the vision of God,—“Their angels do *always* behold the face of My Father which is in heaven.”

Here, then, we see the reason why these scenes of unutterable degradation and anguish were drawn in such strong, vivid lines. It was to form pictures, on which the mind could rest, and feed, and fill itself, and then create within itself the copy, the counter-

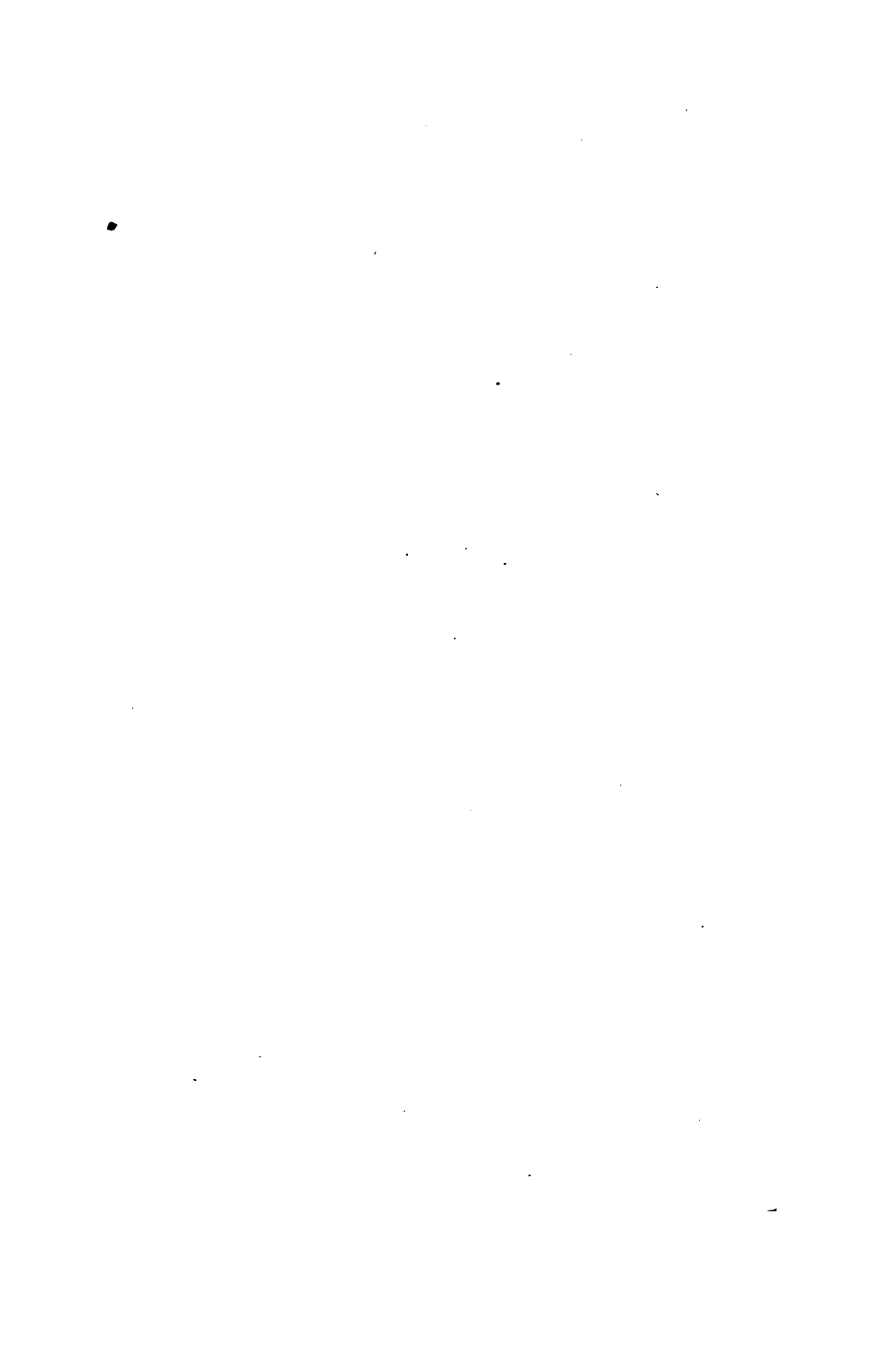
part of the wondrous vision, and that we might thus "be transformed in the renewing of the mind, that we may know what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God." It would be impossible not to be moved to holiness, if the vision of the heavens in their glory were to break in suddenly on the soul; impossible to sin at the moment, if hell were to flash its lurid fires and shrieks of woe across our heart. And it is as impossible to sin, as impossible not to become holy, if by an habitual contemplation the awful sanctity, and beauty, and sweetness of the vision of God, and the holy creation which is of God, are embraced as a living world within the mysterious capacities of the renewed soul; impossible not to deny oneself, while one contemplates the sufferings of God. And each single effort increases the capacity for future efforts, and helps to fix the vision as a habit in the soul. They are efforts at first; they become an instinct, a consciousness, the natural impulse of the soul. It must have been a momentous issue at stake, when the Agony was exhibited to the world as an object of contemplation, to strengthen the soul under trial, to draw it back to its God. Nor can we doubt that it is a sight over which heaven ponders with the intensest interest, when a man, a lost sinner, the child of a fallen world, in the frailty of his flesh, struggling against some besetting sin, using abstinences to overcome himself, hating his soul's

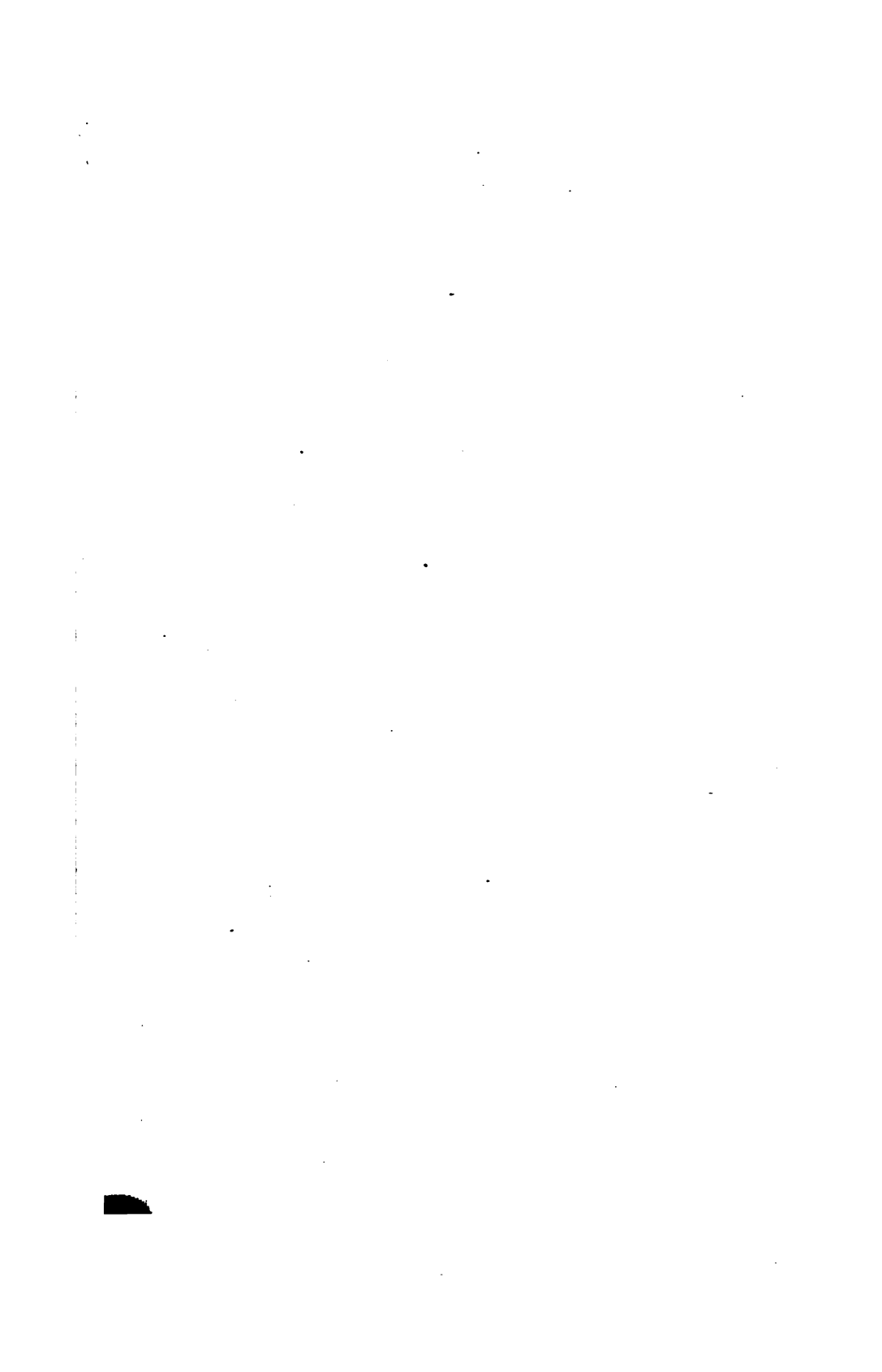
natural impulses, yet feels the sudden flash of temptation hurrying him away; and then, as his last hope, recalls to his mind the form of his Lord in His Agony, and casts himself on the ground, and falls on his face, and places himself in the same posture, and transforms himself into the same image, and prays "more earnestly." Can we doubt that the temptation would pass, and that he would arise from the ground another man, and that Christ would see in him the fruit of the travail of His own soul, and be satisfied? And would not the habitual turning of the soul to the same objects of devout contemplation be an abiding strength which must finally prevail, so that "beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord," he would be "changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord?"

What, then, is the conclusion at which we have arrived? There was a state in which God could not have part with man. The creature's effort to return to God, the creature's struggle to overcome his opposition to the will of God, was a state in which God in His own nature could have no part. What, then, did infinite Love do? He became a creature, that by His own self-discipline in a creature's form,—His own suffering borne in the flesh of the fallen,—He might raise the fallen creature to a union with His Divine nature. He made Himself imperfect, that, before our eyes becoming perfect,

according to the laws of our own being, He might sympathize with us, encourage, win, constrain, all but compel us, to be as He is, by Himself first becoming as we are. He took our nature, and, being in it, endued that nature with new powers, with a strength of endurance, and a fitness for union with God, and a capacity for sanctity like unto the Divine nature; and then, by a wonderful regeneration, imparted to us that transformed nature to be our own, to become ours, that in our new nature we might become like unto Himself; yea, our very nature to be one with His, to be at last perfect, even as His is perfect; one with God, for He is God and Man. Where, then, is the excuse for being swallowed up with overmuch sorrow, or yielding to the frailties of the flesh, or shrinking from the effort of self-discipline? It is excluded by the Agony of God. It was in our nature He bore the Agony, that our nature might learn to "endure all things." What plea can be urged for indolence, love of ease, a smooth life floating along the surface of the world? It is condemned already; it is irreconcilable with the Sweat of "great drops of blood," and the midnight prayer in the garden of Olives. From the depths of His broken, bleeding heart, there sounds continually evermore a Voice, which speaketh as "in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks,"—"As many as I love I rebuke and chasten; be zealous, therefore, and repent . . . Behold I come quickly, hold that fast which thou

hast, that no man take thy crown. . . . To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches."





FINAL IMPENITENCE.

A SERMON,

PREACHED IN

THE CHURCH OF ST. MARY-THE-VIRGIN,
OXFORD,

ON

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 1, 1857.

BY

EDWARD MEYRICK GOULBURN, D.D.,

HEAD MASTER OF RUGBY SCHOOL.

OXFORD,

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JOHN HENRY AND JAMES PARKER.

M DCCC LVII.



A SERMON,

&c.

ST. LUKE xvi. 27, 28.

“Then he said, I pray thee, therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father’s house: for I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment.”

WE are to speak to you this evening on the awful subject of Final Impenitence; and on a subject so full of mystery, so beset (as we conceive) with erroneous fancies, we specially desire to speak in such a manner as that, in our every assertion, we may be led by the hand of God’s Word.

Holy Scripture presents for our contemplation one actual and one imaginary example of Final Impenitence; and from these, as being all that it has pleased Almighty God to reveal, we must gather all that we can ascertain on the subject. The actual example is Judas Iscariot, who is expressly termed “the son of perdition,” and of whom our Lord confesses that he alone of all “the glorious company of the Apostles” was “lost.”

The imaginary example is the rich man of the parable, some of whose words I have just read. In a certain point of view, the imaginary example is even more valuable than the historical one. Our blessed Lord moulded the parable of Dives and Lazarus as it pleased His gracious Wisdom; He had the absolute control of His materials. With the history of an individual, on the other hand, although, of course, it is supremely overruled by the providence of God, there must ever be an interference arising from the agency of man's will. Parts of the example, therefore, may not so exactly suit the lesson which God intends us to draw from them as in a case where the illustration is professedly fictitious.

Yet it is curious and interesting to observe how many points of resemblance the historical and the imaginary example present. The besetting sin of Judas, that which lured him step by step to perdition, was covetousness. Dives is represented as surrounded with all the objects which wealth can purchase, and which, it is implied (if not expressed) in the narrative, had ensnared his affections. Judas grudged to Christ the alabaster-box of ointment of spikenard, secretly wishing that the proceeds of the sale of it might have been thrown into the common purse, and so have swelled his gains and pampered his lust of money. Dives hardens his heart against the sorrows of Lazarus,—cannot afford him aught but the crumbs. Judas stood on the highest pin-

nacle of religious privilege. Dives is a son of Abraham. Judas, though impenitent to the last, displays the relentings of natural affection in his final interview with the chief priests. Dives, even amid the horrors of an eternity of woe, shews that natural sensibility is by no means dead within him.

We invite you then, my brethren, to study the model of Final Impenitence which our Lord Himself has constructed for us, and to frame your notions of its nature exclusively on that model. Let us glean out from this solemn narrative the true idea of the character of Dives. His story is not one of high-handed crime and outrage. It presents to us merely the picture of a selfish and semi-sceptical worldling, lying in the bosom of the Church and in the lap of luxury at the same time.

May Almighty God bless the contemplation of it to your souls !

Our text, then, records the experience and expresses the sentiments of one who had his portion in this life,—the experience, I say, and sentiments of such an one, when he has passed out of this condition of existence into another not cognizable by human senses. We have herè, then, a glimpse afforded us, by Him who cannot lie or deceive, into that mysterious realm which lies beyond the grave, and into those distinct and separate portions of it allotted respectively to the souls of the righteous and the ungodly. The latter is described emphatically as a place of torment, although it is not to be

confounded with that eventual place of torment into which the final sentence of the great judgment-day will bid the ungodly depart. The place spoken of is a place of preliminary and anticipative woe, in which the souls of the impenitent are harassed by a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, and so taste the bitterness of eternal death before that awful sentence is fully consummated upon them.

It is something—it is a step towards higher reaches of faith, to be well assured of the existence and reality of this invisible realm, in which the spirits of the departed energize (for surely such is the plain teaching of the parable) after they are severed from the body, and go through all the processes of consciousness, thought, and feeling. It is something to believe, or rather something to realize the truth, that there is indeed a world more thickly peopled with the spirits of the departed than this earth is with the bodies of the living; and that among the inhabitants of this world there are movements of mind, actings of the will, the memory, the understanding, the affections: on the one hand, a spiritual intercommunion with Christ and the members of Christ, fetching deepest peace into the soul; on the other, all the agitations of fear, remorse, compunction, and despair. Yet is there no outward sign betokening these emotions to the human senses; no burst of anguish venting itself in tears and sighs; no exceeding great and

bitter cry, or at least none that can reach us as we are at present constituted. The realm is to us a shrouded realm, but surely not the less real because we cannot apprehend it with our senses. The very thought of such an invisible, and at the same time so populous and stirring a realm, should have a solemnizing effect upon the mind. If by God's grace we are enabled to realize the thought, this would lift our minds a little out of the earthliness in which their conversancy with the things that are seen, and with the life of the senses, has such a tendency to enwrap them.

Let so much suffice on the general topic brought before us by the passage. Let us now consider briefly what the text implies of the circumstances, sentiments, and character of the rich worldling, who is represented as undergoing torments.

I. As to his circumstances. It is sufficiently indicated that he was a Jew by descent. He calls Abraham father, and Abraham, though separated from him by a great gulf, though unable to render him assistance, or comply with his request, does not refuse to recognise him, in his present outcast and destitute state, as a member of his highly-favoured lineage. "Abraham said unto him, Son, remember." What! a son of Abraham, and yet an outcast! Circumcised the eighth day, and yet a reprobate! A child of God's covenant, and yet a vessel of wrath fitted to destruction! One to whom pertained the adoption, and yet an exile from God and happiness!

A hearer of the law, and yet one against whom the wrath of God is revealed! A rightful heir of glory, and yet an actual partaker of condemnation! My brethren, this character and this doom may easily co-exist; and the possibility of their co-existence is easily explained, when we remember that they are not all Israel who are of Israel, neither is he a Jew who is one outwardly. This miserable out-cast from God's favour had been planted in God's vineyard, the visible Church; he had been born a member of a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; he bore in his body the marks of the covenant; all those high privileges which admission to the covenant involves he had been made free to partake of; from his youth upward he had been surrounded by means of grace; to him, as well as to others, the bleeding sacrifice and other typical ceremonies had preached, in a mystery, the way of life; religious instruction, instruction in the things which concerned his peace, was placed within his reach; in the synagogue, hard by his lordly mansion, Moses and the Prophets had been read every Sabbath-day: and yet he was lost; his latter end was that he perished for ever.

II. From the position and circumstances of this rich worldling, we next proceed to consider his sentiments. He is represented as imploring Abraham to save his five brethren from the doom in which he had irretrievably involved himself, by sending them an unearthly warning of the reality of a future

state of existence, and of its horrors for the ungodly. He would not that his brethren, whom, perhaps, he had encouraged by his example in evil courses, should be implicated in the same utter ruin with himself. My brethren, we have just been warning you how very possibly the highest religious privileges may co-exist with such a state of heart and character as will insure condemnation to its possessor; we now warn you how very possibly the amiabilities of natural character may co-exist with such a state.

It does not seem that every spark of natural affection, exile from God and from happiness though he be, is extinguished in this man's breast. Great as was the selfishness and the indifference to the wants and miseries of others which during his lifetime he had exhibited, he still nourishes that regard for his brethren, his kinsmen according to the flesh, which nature has planted in the hearts of all of us. He is not yet a demon, although destined for ever to be the associate of demons. Touches of human feeling for those who were once nearly connected with him by the ties of blood, and whose ruin he was instrumental in promoting,—feelings which gave rise to an earnest desire for their rescue,—redeem him from that charge of utter hardness and settled hatred to all other created beings which we are apt, perhaps erroneously apt, to associate with our notions of the denizens of hell. We instinctively regard the place of torment as a place where none

but malignant and selfish feelings can be at work ; a place where the kindlier emotions of compassion, sympathy, good-will cannot in any form, or under any circumstances, find admittance. And whether this view of the subject be true or not, certain it is that the result of our instinctively admitting and maintaining it has a most prejudicial effect upon our minds. We argue (and if not with perfect conclusiveness, at least with some show of reason,) thus :—If nothing in the form of natural affection, kindly feeling, or good-will towards men, can find admittance into hell ; if all such emotions be uncongenial with the utter depravity and obduracy of the inhabitants of that place, then so long as these emotions, these touches of sensibility, linger in my nature, there is always a redeeming point in me ; I need not apprehend that my portion will be with the ungodly, however few my qualifications to rank among God's saints.

Such is, I believe, not the expressed, but the implicit, reasoning of many a worldly and unrenewed mind, when contemplating (under convictions of conscience) the eternal prospect which lies before it. But is this reasoning anything more than a mere palliative, whose effects are soothing for the time being, but in the issue aggravate the evil ? Will even the grounds on which this reasoning is based, the premises which lead to the conclusion, bear examination ? We think not. We would not overstrain the significance of a parable, or find in

it more than it was intended to convey, but we think we may safely deduce from the passage before us the obvious inference, that the harbouring of natural affection is not incompatible with the condition of the reprobate.

And thus have we clearly made out two distinct points respecting Dives—points of character and of situation—not, indeed, sufficient to secure his salvation, but both, so far as they go, favourable rather than unfavourable to it. First, he was a member of the then existing Church of God; secondly, he was not wholly devoid of all benevolent and disinterested feeling.

III. Let me mention a third point, still more favourable to his salvation than the two preceding, but still quite insufficient to secure it: this is, that so far as appears from the narrative, he had not been guilty of any crime, of any gross or palpable offence whatever. Ungodly he might be, and was; selfish he might be, and was; but he does not appear to have been, in any true sense of the term, a wicked man. “There was a certain rich man;”—well, the mere possession of riches is no crime: what evil had he done? We do not read that he had done any. He had not hurled blasphemous defiance against the Most High. His wealth, for aught that appears to the contrary, had been innocently acquired, not wrung by oppression out of the spoils of widows’ houses. Nor are we led to suppose that the luxury in which he lived ever degenerated into

licence. And so he seemed to stand fairer for heaven than a great many professing Christians, who are unclean, intemperate, openly vicious. And yet, notwithstanding all these favourable points in his character, he made shipwreck of his immortal soul.

My brethren, these remarks may serve to confute the fatal error of those in whose estimation the only real sins in existence are sins of commission. And how numerous a class is this ! How many are there who congratulate themselves on the many wrong things which they have never done,—“God, I thank Thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican,”—without ever taking into consideration the many right things which they have left undone. Now here is an instance of a man numbered with the transgressors, of whom no single sin of commission is left upon record. Oh take the warning, you who are looking to your innocence of crimes, of gross outward transgressions, as that which will save you, or be a sufficient evidence of a renewed heart. Many, as innocent as yourself of positive transgression, are now set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.

What, then, was the sin, a wilful and impenitent continuance in which ensured the eternal loss of this worldling's soul. With setting before you briefly the nature of this sin in its root and in its fruit, we shall conclude our consideration of the parable,

and enter upon the practical and personal application of it.

The sin, in its root, (for every sin has a root, a state of mind out of which it springs and to which it is referable,) was unbelief^a. And I think I shall not err if I say that it appears to have been unbelief, not so much of a future state generally, as of a future state of eternal punishment in particular. Dives had heard of the resurrection of the unjust. He never cared openly to dispute the truth of the doctrine,—he was no avowed infidel,—but he had never realized it to his mind, until the bitterest experience proved it to be a certainty.

^a This is shewn satisfactorily by Dean Trench, in his "Notes on the Parables." He says; "It ought never to be left out of sight or forgotten, that it is not the primary purpose of the parable to teach the fearful consequences which will follow on the abuse of wealth and on the hard-hearted contempt of the poor,—this only subordinately,—but the fearful consequences of unbelief, of having the heart set on this world, and refusing to give credence to the invisible world which is here known only to faith, until by a miserable and too late experience the existence of such an unseen world has been discovered. The sin of Dives in its root is unbelief: hard-hearted contempt of the poor, luxurious squandering on self, are only the forms which it takes,—the seat of the disease is within, these are but the running sores which witness for the inward plague. He who believes not in an invisible world of righteousness and truth and spiritual joy, must of necessity place his hope in the things which he sees, which he can touch, and taste, and smell,—will come to trust in them and to look to them for his blessedness, while he knows of no other: it is not of the essence of the matter, whether he hoards or squanders, in either case he sets his hope on the world."—(pp. 434, 435.)

My brethren, there are thousands of professing Christians who nourish, I do not say an avowed, but an implicit and virtual, unbelief of precisely the same character. Perchance in some of your minds, my hearers, doubts have at times arisen whether it is conceivable that a God of mercy should ever execute the threatenings (as you cannot question that He will fulfil the promises) of the Gospel. And this is especially liable to be the case where the conscience is casting about for a plea of indulgence to some sin which the heart cherishes, and cannot yet be prevailed upon to part with. In such cases, it frequently happens that a doubt on this article of faith is frequently and eagerly admitted into the mind, by way of mitigating and relieving that impenetrable darkness which rests upon the soul's eternal prospects. The man would very earnestly and with much sincerity disclaim the charge of infidelity. Nor is he, in the ordinary sense of the term, an infidel. He never questioned, it may be, the doctrine of a future state of blessedness for the righteous, though even this he is far from apprehending with a realizing faith.

But what shall we say, brethren, of the genuineness of that man's belief, who, instead of yielding implicit credit to the entire testimony of God, arbitrarily accepts one part of that testimony as worthy of credit, and rejects another? Faith is the receiving God's assurances as infallibly true, upon God's independent authority. He, therefore, who receives

only some of those assurances, does not receive even them upon God's authority, (for otherwise, would he not admit the others also?) but because they jump with the conclusions of his own reason, or the inclinations of his own corrupt heart. He is not really resting his belief upon the testimony of God, though he may admit freely many things which the Holy Scripture asserts.

But I must hasten on to point out the particular development of unbelief with which this narrative presents us.

If a man have no realizing apprehension of a future state, still more if he entertain doubts respecting some revealed particulars of that state, the natural consequence, the practical operation of such views, will be a living for this world. All beyond the grave is, in such a man's apprehensions, hazy, indistinct, uncertain. What counsel, then, does his heart give him, if his mind have imbibed such views? What other, than that which the Preacher gives in a strain of holy irony and pitiful sarcasm,—“A man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry. Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart. Let thy garments be always white, and let thy head lack no ointment. Rejoice, O young man, in the days of thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart and in the sight of thine eyes.”

Now this is just the counsel which Dives seems

to have adopted ; these are precisely the principles on which he regulated his life. His aim was to enjoy himself, to lead a life of ease and self-indulgence. With this view, he surrounded himself with those refinements of luxury which only wealth can purchase, and which, unhappily for his spiritual welfare, an uninterrupted flow of prosperity enabled him to procure. He secluded himself, as much as he could, from annoying sights and distressing sounds. Whenever, accidentally, misery or want met his eye, he turned away as from an object distressing to contemplate.

And hence, probably, more than from any settled hardness of heart, sprang his culminating offence, his entire lack of service to God's poor. Lazarus lying at his gate, full of sores, was an offensive object ; he would not therefore encourage the attendance of the wretched beggar by affording him relief, —this would only make him a constant pensioner on his bounty. 'To apply himself to the remedy of want and suffering would only be to summon up that train of melancholy reflections which he was desirous of banishing for ever from his mind.

Behold then, brethren, in three words, the origin and development of that sin, which, cherished to the end of his days, issued in the ruin of his soul,—Practical unbelief ; a living unto self and for this world ; an entire forgetfulness of the wants of others. Nothing flagrant, nothing vicious, nothing openly immoral, but quite enough to conduct

him to that awful realm, where their worm dieth not and their fire is not quenched.

My brethren, our subject admits of, or rather it challenges, a close application to our own circumstances, and that in regard both of the times on which we are fallen, and of the place in which our lot is cast.

1. A subtle disbelief of the spiritual world in general, and of a future state of existence, (at least on the side of eternal punishment,) is fast insinuating itself into the minds of the respectable, the educated, and thoughtful classes. Do not imagine that, in making such a statement, we are guilty of exaggeration. There are many symptoms abroad in the opinions of society which indicate this underlying infidelity. Thus we have dropped to a great extent our belief in the agency of angels, good and evil,—a doctrine written with a sunbeam by the hand of God Himself, so plainly and explicitly revealed in Holy Scripture, that “he who runs may read it.” Partly through reaction from certain errors of Romanism, (a reaction which commenced at the Reformation, but the tide of which is still pulsing on among us,) partly through that explosion of old superstitions and popular errors which is being brought about by the advancement of science and the diffusion of knowledge; but chiefly through the tendency of our own hearts, whose vanity is irritated by truths which they cannot explain, and which shrink from the thought of a world of spirits, as

a thing unfamiliar to their present experience ; it has come to pass, that a lively sense of angelic interferences with human affairs, yea, a lively sense of the very personality and existence of angels, has utterly lost its hold upon the mind of the present generation,—is to us all “as a dream, when one awaketh.” Would not one provoke an inward smile in general society, even if good breeding should not allow it outwardly to transpire, who should profess his perfect assurance (or, rather, his consciousness) that angels ascend and descend upon every heir of salvation, just as upon Jacob of old when he pillowed his head upon the stones of Haran,—that they guard such an one in fiery battle array, just as they guarded Elisha in Dothan ? Yet the holy Apostle asks explicitly, in plain and not in figurative language, “Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation ?”

Again, there is a growing, and even avowed, disbelief among the most earnest and thoughtful men of the day on the subject of eternal punishment. And here I would remark that disbelief of the *future* world, in any of its aspects, is very closely connected with disbelief of the *unseen* world which is at present around us. Future things, the things of eternity, are merely the development of things at present unseen. And the habit of mind which calls in question unseen things, virtually calls in question things eternal also ; for “the things which are not seen”

are, as the Apostle says, "eternal." I am aware that the difficulty explicitly put forward against the doctrine of eternal punishment, is its supposed irreconcilability with the love of our Heavenly Father. But the real springs of men's belief are often hidden from themselves. And those who harbour a belief contrary to this great doctrine, will do well to examine themselves closely as to the reality of their faith generally in the agencies and experiences of the unseen world.

The truth is, that great intellectual advancement and the progress of scientific research, with all its advantages, has no doubt its drawbacks. When natural philosophers are every day opening up some new second cause, of which we were previously in ignorance; when nature presents to us ever more and more the appearance of being governed by law and system, and not by arbitrary interferences; it does become a hard struggle for an educated and a thinking mind (and the more educated and thinking, the harder) to maintain the early freshness, the childlike simplicity of our faith. Such a struggle is the price which the educated man pays for his education, for that enlargement of the faculties which makes him competent to a higher degree of mental enjoyment than the peasant. We ought to feel no surprise, if we discover in him something to compensate for that vast advantage; if the child and the peasant discern more clearly than he those divine things of faith, which, by the very consti-

tution of our minds, the exercise of mere natural reason rather obscures. The sun at noonday enables us to examine and scrutinize all the objects on the surface of our planet—the delicate texture of the leaf and the blossom, and the sand which is washed up from the river's bed. This is a real and grand advantage, even in a moral point of view; for after examining the structure of that blossom, a devout heart will send up its tribute of adoration to the Creator. But is the presence of the sun pure gain in the way of discernment, without any counterbalancing loss? I trow not. While we are examining the leaf and the blossom on earth, our antipodes, wrapped in thickest night, are contemplating the jewels of heaven, "the moon and the stars which the Lord hath ordained." Darkness, which seals up our bodily eyes to the things of earth, unseals them to the glories of a sublimer sphere. Something of the same kind is observable in the human reason. The free development and exercise of it, while on one side it supplies the mind with fresh matter for glorifying God, on the other has a tendency to dim our apprehension of those divine things which are the objects of faith, even as the sun draws a veil over the stars. I shall suppose, then, the case of a man who, while orthodox in all the main articles of his religious belief, and nominally a member of the Church, has allowed his faith in things unseen and eternal to be secretly sapped. In that he resembles Dives.

2. The second point to which I shall call your attention, in applying to our own consciences the warning of the text, is the atmosphere of religious privilege, which my academical hearers specially, but those residing in the city also in good measure, habitually inhale. Perhaps there are few places which are so favoured in this respect as our two Universities. Always hitherto accounted as great seminaries of the Church, they appropriately present both to the eye and ear more of the outward tokens of Christianity than any other cities of the empire. Ascend any eminence in the neighbourhood, and you see their hundred spires pointing upwards with silent finger to the azure firmament, above which God hath planted His throne; and there comes up to your ear the music of their bells, calling the inhabitants to prayer with a frequency characteristic of the most primitive and the purest times.

Yet who does not know that, where no corresponding zeal and spirituality exist in the heart, this frequency of religious ordinance and privilege acts rather as a soporific than as a stimulant, makes eternal things more hazy and less substantial than they were, when worship more rarely recurred. Daily prayer and weekly communion are the joy and delight of a spiritual and devout mind, and the more spiritual any mind becomes, the more does it discover an internal craving after these things; but what are they to the mind of a world-

ling, to one whose desires, hopes, and affections soar not above this transitory sphere? What such an one needs is a thorough awakening from the trance of sin, and the devout aspirations which take shape in the daily or weekly worship of the Church, have nothing awakening in them. They are the breathings of the reconciled soul, not the trumpet-call of alarm to the hypocrites in Zion. Accordingly, the holy offices themselves become a snare to many. An unreal religion is made by them more dreamy still. And protest as one may against delusion, both in one's own case and that of others, it stealthily winds its way (more or less) into the bosom of all of us. We have such a natural antipathy to the task of laying ourselves *quite* bare before God, and not allowing to our religious circumstantialia *any* weight in the estimate of our religious character, that we seldom as a fact honestly do it. We defer it, we put it away to a more convenient season; conscious of our spiritual nakedness, we shrink behind the trees of the garden, to shelter us from the intolerable scrutiny of those eyes which are "as a flame of fire."

My brethren, is it thus with any of you? When the arrows of conviction fly around your head, are you sheltering yourself behind the battlements of religious ordinance, which in this place fence you round? silencing the clamours of conscience by an appeal to the propriety of your externals, and declining to enter by an honest self-examination into

the springs of your own character? The impenitent Dives dwelt, like yourself, in the bosom of the Church, and called Abraham father.

3. But again. A college life is notoriously one of ease, one which furnishes all the materials of self-indulgence. The younger members of our Universities have, as a general rule, no cares; do not even understand what anxiety is. Their wants are provided for at the expense of their parents, and the allowance is generally such as to leave a considerable margin for comforts, and for what may be even called, and would be reckoned at the homes of many of them, luxuries. Magnificent foundations, endowed with large revenues, do for the senior members of the Academy what parental care (and often parental self-sacrifice) does for the junior; so that, without any large fortunes, or any very extraordinary resources, all the upper classes in this place may be said to be at their ease; their wants are no sooner felt than they are met. My hearers will assent to this statement, if they consider how very rarely, when an academic is inclined to purchase any article of luxury or comfort, he is held back by the consideration that he really cannot give the price. He may deny himself the indulgence from other and better motives; but incapacity to obtain it seldom forms one of his reasons for abstaining from the purchase. Nay, even the dependents of colleges, if I may judge from an acquaintance of some years with them which I

formerly enjoyed, are generally to be reckoned among the easy and prosperous classes of the community: they are usually provided for, not extravagantly, but, according to their line of life, sufficiently; put out of the reach of pressure (may I not say?) beyond the lot of the domestics of private families.

But easy circumstances are characteristic not only of the place, but of the times also on which we are thrown. This is an age in which the useful and ornamental arts have received, and are receiving, a most extraordinary development. Comfort and luxury follow as handmaids in the train of this development. What chamber of our houses is there which is not interpenetrated by luxury, in which there are not many articles of convenience or of simple ornament which might well be spared, articles which minister not to the necessities, but only to the refinements and elegancies of life? The vast machinery of some great factory now-a-days weaves, or dyes, or prints "purple and fine linen" with such volubility and in such abundance that, like silver in the days of Solomon, "it is nothing accounted of." The abodes of our lower middle classes scarcely ever lack some engraving on their walls; the cheapest and commonest book is decorated in the binding with some ornamental device on its cover. All which things are indications of the exuberance which luxury has attained among us—an exuber-

ance of resource and pride, which throws out shoots and suckers in every department of our life.

Now our Lord, in the parable before us, represents this development of resources as having a dangerous tendency, as contributing something material to strengthen the impenitence of the natural heart. Why else is the rich man depicted as clad "in purple and fine linen, and faring sumptuously every day," but to teach us that the lap of ease forms for the Christian a most perilous position; that when this influence combines, on the one hand, with that of a polite scepticism, which nibbles away as much as it can of doctrines distasteful to our reason and feelings, and, on the other, with that of a religious formalism, which sings a lullaby to the conscience as often as it is inclined to be fretful and fractious, the three agencies operating in the same direction, form a thick film of insensibility over the heart, which, if not torn away by some of God's most trenchant chastisements, hardens it effectually against that Grace which can alone reclaim it?

Yet, when we speak of insensibility of heart, think not that we imply any want of liveliness or warmth in the natural affections. The teaching of the parable is, that a man may be spiritually dead, (yea, abandoned to Final Impenitence,) who yet responds to the tie of blood, and whose natural feelings retain still their liveliness and sensibility

unimpaired. And if the conscience of any one of my hearers has been struck and alarmed by certain features of the parallel between his own character and circumstances and those of Dives, I beseech him to follow me one step further, while I add what, perchance, may be the crowning stroke to that parallel.

Not the least striking part of our parable, then, is the warning which it holds out to us against looking to natural amiabilities as supplying us with any ground of confidence towards God. Now these amiabilities attach, indeed, to our nature in whatever condition it is found, but most especially do they characterize it in the prime of life. Youth is proverbially warm-hearted, affectionate, and generous. Good-nature and quickness of sensibility are its distinguishing graces. We would not be understood to depreciate these points of natural character; let them stand for what they are worth: and, in a social point of view, we willingly admit that they are worth much. They are essential to our welfare and happiness as members of society. But beware, we entreat you, of regarding them with complacency in a religious point of view, as if they were the soft relents of grace, the tenderness of the renewed heart, or in any way safeguards against that damnation which shall assuredly overtake the ungodly. Beware of the fallacy which the alarmed conscience is so prone to take up with, that, because

these touches of sensibility still linger in your nature, therefore there is a redeeming point in your religious character, and you need not apprehend that eventually you will prove an outcast from the Divine favour. And we feel that a special necessity exists for this warning at the present time. For a school of Theology is making its appearance in the Church, whose language goes far to annihilate the distinction, as on the one hand between the natural flights of the human intellect, and inspiration ; so, on the other, between the natural graces of human character, and religious principle. Natural amiabilities, it is asserted, and the lofty flights of the poet and the orator, come from God. So, no doubt, they do ; for St. James, speaking by the Spirit of God, says, “ Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.” But as there is a positive difference *in kind* between the Bible and the noblest of uninspired compositions, so is there the same wide and immeasurable distinction to be drawn between those kindly impulses and affections which are the fruit of nature, and those holy dispositions of heart which are the fruit of the Spirit, and have reference to the unearthly and spiritual relations in which each one of us stands to God, to Christ, to eternity.

The noblest of those holy dispositions, and that without which whosoever liveth is dead unto God, (however alive to the impulses of nature,) is a self-

sacrificing love—such a disposition towards others, for God's sake, as leads us to look upon, to consider, and to relieve the distresses under which they labour. It is a spirit which, so far from putting away human misery, and seeking to hide it from our eyes, prosecutes it into the dark lanes and alleys, where it shuns the sight of the courtly, and seeks, at any expense to self, to apply a remedy to it.

My brethren, if you cannot discern in your present character the germ of such a spirit; if you have nothing to shew, in lieu of it, higher and better than natural amiability; and if, in addition to this feature, ease and self-indulgence, combined with the external forms of religion, characterize your lot, while doubts of certain unpalatable doctrines secretly indulged, but only half confessed, have begun to make inroads on your faith; what is this but the very character of the rich man of our parable, only unfolded under the forms of modern society in the West, rather than of ancient society in the East?

And the end of such a character, its final issue from the trial-furnace of life, it is almost too terrible to prosecute even in thought. Not that any violent moral spasms, any great convulsions of the inner man, any headlong downfalls from grace, render it so terrible. Ah no! the issue is terrible rather in the deadly, stagnant quiet which ushers it in, and of which it is the legitimate consummation. It is terrible in its calmness, not

terrible in its strife. The man travels to his eternal doom without any dismal presage upon his spirit of what awaits him. He nears it daily, and is daily less affected by the prospect. The whole tenor of his life has been free from "changes;" why should he apprehend now a sudden reversal of the law which has regulated all his former experience, a change from "purple" and "sumptuous fare" to quenchless thirst and everlasting burnings? He sickens; well, his death-bed is made as easy as the appliances of art and the resources of luxury can make it; and in compliance with those devout forms of which he has, perhaps, been through life a fairly punctual observer, the minister of Jesus Christ is sent for to soothe his last moments with the consolations of Religion. Ah! what can be done, or even reasonably looked for, when now the eleventh hour is past, and it is well-nigh on the stroke of the twelfth. The first instinct of a worldling grown grey in his worldliness, with the film of the world thickened upon his heart, is an armed and sensitive reserve as to the experiences of the inner man, by which he pushes away any one who seeks to probe them. But has he any such experiences to be probed? Ah, well may we ask it; for he has been living an outward life so long, and so quelling every approach to reality on the subject of religion, that whether genuine religious feeling survives in him may be doubted. By his manner,

by the evident discomposure which he, or perhaps his friends for him, evince on the first attempt at searching conversation, the minister is driven to fall back on reading without any definite aim, and on a few formal prayers adapted to cases in general, and altogether wide of the mark. The droning sound of these almost mechanical devotions is still in his ear, as his breathing becomes more short and rapid, and his eye glazes, and the moisture of the last struggle oozes out upon his brow. They apply a mirror to his lips,—no stain rests upon it,—he is gone—gone to his own place, the place reserved for Final Impenitence. Clear and sharp in outline, (ah, how different from those indistinct and hazy impressions which have come to him latterly from the things of time!) now dawn upon his soul the horrors of eternity: “In hell he lifts up his eyes, being in torments.”

Lord of Love and Pity, who in compassion to perishing souls, troubled with no changes, and lulled in the security of a prosperous worldliness, spakest this parable, let its moral be graven indelibly on all our hearts. Deliver every soul, who hears Thy Word to-night, from the snares of subtle unbelief, complacent self-indulgence, and heartless indifference to the sufferings of others. Use what discipline Thou wilt, Gracious Lord; cut, wound, pierce, burn, spare not the sharp surgery of pain, care, poverty, bereavement; so as Thou only separatest us thereby from our clinging love to the

things of this world, and makest unseen things a reality to us. To live in things below, to centre hope and heart in them, is the sin which, according to Thy own testimony, most surely paves the way to Final Impenitence. Deliver us from it, Merciful Lord, at any cost of suffering to ourselves; only so bless our sufferings to us by Thy Grace, that they may imbue our hearts with a portion of Thy Divine tenderness, and lead us to the diligent fulfilment of that precept, which Thou hast Thyself so marvellously exemplified,—

“Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.”



*REPENTANCE, FROM LOVE OF GOD,
LIFE-LONG.*

A SERMON,

PREACHED IN

THE CHURCH OF ST. MARY-THE-VIRGIN,
OXFORD,

ON

THURSDAY, APRIL 2, 1857.

BY

EDWARD BOUVERIE PUSEY, D.D.,
REGIUS PROFESSOR OF HEBREW, AND CANON OF CHRIST CHURCH.

OXFORD,
AND 377, STRAND, LONDON:
JOHN HENRY AND JAMES PARKER.

M DCCCLVII.



A SERMON,

8c.

S. LUKE xxii. 61, 62.

And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny Me thrice. And Peter went out, and wept bitterly.

RICH in its harvest of souls, beyond all other seasons, is this our season of Lent. How should it not be, by God's goodness, when it brings before us our own sins, and leads us on, step by step, to the Cross of Jesus? But many are called, few chosen; many begin, few persevere; many begin, again and again, in this season of Lent; but Easter, our Passover, instead of being a time of passing and pressing on, in haste, with our loins girded up to serve God, is a time of falling back.

And therefore now, towards the close of this our season of Lent, when we are just on the threshold of our dear Lord's Passion, in which we see most vividly the black ingratitude and hatefulness of our sins, and the deep lustre of His forgiving love, it has been assigned to me to speak to you of that mark of true loving repentance that it is life-long. In other words, true sorrow for sin, out of love for

Jesus, does not pass away. The more we hope that we are the objects of the love of Jesus, the more we hope that He has forgiven our sins, and renewed us by His Spirit, and loves us, the more we must sorrow, if we love, that we ever sinned against His Infinite Love.

Of such life-long repentance for forgiven sin, an Apostle, yea, the very chief Apostle, is our pattern.

S. Peter's was an awful fall, a fall from which men rarely recover. It was a fall against the strongest previous light, in the presence of the Light Himself. In the very sight of Jesus, he denied Jesus. Even Pilate, although he condemned Jesus, was awed by Him. Pilate half believed. He would have believed, if he could have loved. Those who accused Jesus were put to shame; His judges were confounded, because striving to bring false witness against the Holy One and the Just, they failed.

Peter saw this; he saw his Master's majestic silence, and His judges crouching and quailing, even amid their malignant hate, as owning already against their will Him who "should come to be their judge." Peter had received the fullest knowledge, and that by revelation of God. Our Lord had sealed the truth of his inward inspiration when He said, "Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven^a." He had confessed our Lord to be God and Man:

^a S. Matt. xvi. 17.

“Thou,” the Son of Man, “art the Son of the living God;” and on this he had received the promises. He had beheld death at a distance, and, foremost of all, had said, “Lord, I will go with Thee to prison and to death.” Foremost in profession, he was alone in denial. He had owned his Lord to be the Son of God, now he denied being His disciple, or even that he knew Him.

Forewarned, but unshaken in his self-confidence, he fell. His Lord Himself had warned him before his fall; he ventured into peril: amid his peril, and fallen already, he was warned by the sign which his Lord had given him. He took no heed, continued in peril, and fell worse than before. Falls always prepare for further falls. As is the case in the body too, it is more difficult to recover, than not to fall. Innocence is a great safeguard. However near a man may have been to falling, it is something to have been saved, by God’s mercy, from the entire fall. Shame, which aids to withhold from a fall, withholds from repentance. It was harder for Peter to confess our Lord, when he had once denied Him. He had to contradict himself. And so, the more the truth was brought home to him, “Thou art a Galilæan,—thy speech bewrayeth thee,” the more desperately he denied it. Several seem to have accused him at once; and he, driven into a corner, as men do, turned the more desperately against them, and, with perjury and imprecation on himself, denied his Lord. “Then began Peter to

curse and to swear, saying, I know not the Man." "The cock crew." "The Lord turned and looked upon Peter." That look brought him back to himself and to Jesus. That "look lived in him," during all the years of his Apostolate. He died to himself, that he might live to Jesus; and living to Jesus, in the end he died for Jesus.

Peter's was a very great sin. At first sight, it seems as great a sin as Judas'. Judas sold his Lord; Peter denied Him. It *was* a very great sin; but it was the sin of presumption, not of malice. It was not directed against his Master, as was Judas'. But of all a Christian's sins, it was one of the worst. Our Lord Himself has said, "Whoso shall be ashamed of Me and of My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed when He cometh in His own glory and His Father's before the holy angels;" and "Whosoever shall deny Me before men, him will I also deny before My Father in heaven^b." S. Peter trusted himself more than his Lord. For his Lord had said to him, "Thou canst not follow Me *now*, but thou shalt follow Me *afterwards*. He promised him for the future, while He deterred him for the present. Peter would outrun his Master's call. He saw what he wished to do for his Master; he weighed not what he *could* do. He would die for his Master, before his Master had yet died to redeem *him*. The Passion of Christ is

^b S. Matt. x. 33.

the fountain of grace, of strength, of endurance, of every blessing. Before that fountain was opened, Peter would do, in his own strength, what his Lord had promised him that he should do, but only in his Redeemer's. And so he could not but fall. Jesus allowed him to fall, (as now, too, He almost always allows the self-confident to fall); and so He revealed himself to himself, that thenceforth he might build upon the Rock, not upon himself.

Yet Peter's fall was the fall of self-confident love. Had he not loved, he would not have adventured into the High Priest's palace at all. "He went in to see the end." He went to see what would become of his Master whom he loved. Perhaps he thought that, when the chief priests saw Him face to face, and heard His words, they could not venture to condemn Him. Or he may have gone in, with that sort of uncertain hope which people have, that what they dread will not happen, although they know not *how* it should not; only they cannot bring themselves to think that what they fear so exceedingly, will be. And so his faith, which rested not blindly on his Lord, failed when his hopes failed. He had trusted in his own hopes, that he would in some way be spared the trial; not in his Master, to be borne through it, and over it. And so, when his hopes failed, his faith and his love also failed. Had he not had love, he would not have ventured into danger; had he had that "perfect love" which "casteth out fear," he would not have been betrayed into the great sin of

denying the Lord, through fear of a little maid, lest he should be called to fulfil his loving boast, "Lord, I will follow Thee to prison and to death."

Peter, then, was not like souls who fall into sin because, for love of the pleasure of the sin, they venture as near it as they dare. He was led into the near occasion of sin by a self-trusting love of his Master. He was like those over-confident souls who think that, to do some good, they may venture into peril, which proves too strong for them. They seldom return without the feeling of a wound. They either have not done what they ought, or they have done what they ought not. They have either failed to do anything for Christ at all; or they feel that they have displeased Him in some unloving, unhumble way of doing it; or they have even been ashamed of Christ, and consented to what they should not. For we may deny our Lord, without doing it directly towards Himself. He says to S. Peter, "Thou shalt deny Me thrice." Yet S. Peter (God forbid!) did not say anything against our Lord; he denied of himself, that he was Christ's disciple. So, then, for a man in thought, or word, or act to deny that he is Christ's disciple, is to deny Christ. Alas! among those who are thought to be Christians, and who think themselves such, how manifold are such denials! And yet, had our good Lord then left S. Peter, he must have perished. "Lord, to whom shall we go?" S. Peter had said: "Thou hast the words of eternal life." And he

had gone away from Him, of whom he had owned that He alone had life eternal !

Yet thus, too, Jesus looked on Peter, as He does so often on us, by some sudden check of conscience, or upbraiding of His tenderness, or thrilling sorrow, or burning shame, that we have not been faithful to Him, our loving Saviour. Only His gracious look on S. Peter had this gift also, that it at once brought home to him his sin, and sealed his forgiveness. It could not be otherwise. It was He, the Redeemer, the Fountain of Mercy, “ with Whom is plenteous redemption.” *His* Eye, which pierced His disciple’s soul, and drew the water out of what had just then been as a rock of flint, could not but have beamed with Divine tenderness, which healed while it wounded. O could we but see that Eye, as it rests on each one of us, amid our sins, or negligences, or unfaithfulnesses ! How could we bear, ourselves to have deserved that reproachful, displeased look ? how could we enough, out of our shame and misery, adore His mercy, which vouchsafed to look on such as us !

Yet *therefore* is that full, brief history of Peter’s repentance the more instructive, because he was forgiven. “ He went out, and wept bitterly.”

Doubtless he then no longer “ feared those who could only kill the body.” If he still had fear, one only fear had he—the fear of sin, and of displeasing his Good Lord. He went out from the scene of his

sin, from the occasion of his sin, from the temptation to his sin. This is the first step of earnest repentance. In one act, he confessed his presumption, he owned his weakness, he corrected his fault, he placed himself out of temptation. True penitence is ever humble, and distrustful of self, while it trusts in Jesus. "Whoso remains in a slippery place, must think lightly of his fall^d." Whoso remains in what has been to him an occasion of sin, has no true repentance. If thou wouldest truly repent, flee the places, the haunts, the occasions, the opportunities of thy sin.

This was Peter's first decisive act. He removed from risk of sin ; he removed into loneliness. Loneliness is the place of repentance. If God touches thy soul, quit others, at least for the time, and sorrow to Him apart. Sorrow for sin, out of love for Jesus, must be apart from the world, and alone with Jesus. Let Him Who gavé thee thy sorrow, alone be the witness of it. Those are true tears which He alone witnesses, which are shed apart to Him. Peter went out from the sight of men. He knew that his Saviour's Eye still rested on him, as his Saviour's look lived in his heart.

He "wept bitterly," and yet he knew himself forgiven. This is another mark of true repentance. He sorrowed for forgiven sin. Repentance cannot be real, unless it remove from occasions of sin ; it

^d S. Bern., Serm. Pasch. i. § 17, p. 905.

cannot be deep, unless it continue when its sin is (as it hopes) forgiven.

This is the characteristic difference between true and surface repentance. True repentance is life-long. So far from ending with forgiveness, one might rather say that it then begins. While the soul fears that it is unforgiven, its penitence is a penitence of fear. It dreads Hell; it dreads the wrath of God, and, at best, it dreads being shut out for ever from His Presence. Its object is chiefly itself. The penitence of forgiven sin is a penitence of love. True, it is still displeased with itself; it must mourn its lost graces, its soils and stains and scars; its crippled powers; its dwarfed stature; its weakness towards good; its distance from its God; else it would not be penitence. It must know and feel that it has undergone a great loss through its sin; that it is but the wreck of what it might have been, had it not so sinned. It must long—if not to be replaced where it might have been, in that nearness to God for which He made it—yet to have as much of His love, as, through His undeserved mercy, it can any how obtain. Yet it is ever chiefly taken up with the thought of God and the love of God. “Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned.”

Such has been the character of those great models of Scripture penitents, David, and S. Peter, and S. Paul. They were penitents for forgiven sin; and their penitence lasted all their life long. God

saw David's penitence in those two words, (as David spake them*,) "I have sinned against the Lord." Who can tell or imagine the agony of David's soul, as Nathan rehearsed to him God's goodness to him, his yet larger abundance of goods which He had had in store for him, had he asked of his God, what he gained through such sin, *his* ingratitude and God's displeasure? But in that brief space of grief, David's heart was pierced through and through; his penitence was begun, expressed, accepted. The confession, "I have sinned against the Lord," was met by the authoritative words, "The Lord also hath put away thy sin." God Himself declared that *He* had "put away the sin," and it was not. But David's penitence then began to flow. He who had been forgiven by God, was taught by the Spirit of God to utter that deep Psalm of penitence, which has ever since expressed the inmost longings of penitent souls: "Have mercy upon me, O God, after Thy great goodness." God's voice had pardoned him, yet he longed to be washed more and more from his wickedness. O doubtless that "more and more," "wash me more and more from my wickedness," echoed on from David's lips, as it has on theirs whom God has taught, through him, the words of penitence, until the last "more and more" yielded up the soul, wholly purified by its Saviour's Blood, "in whom, not seen, he believed." It must

have lasted on, for he says, long after he had been forgiven, "My sin is ever before me."

S. Paul's sin, in persecuting Christians and compelling them to blaspheme, had been forgiven, as if it had never been. He was wholly a new man. He was out of Christ when he sinned. When he believed in Christ and was baptized, he was re-born in Christ, and became a new man. Yet on account of this sin, as to which Ananias bade him "be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord," he to whom God bare witness, "he is a chosen vessel unto Me," so remembered his sin that he counted himself "the chief of sinners;" "less than the least of all saints," i. e. lower than the lowest Christian, who, before he was in Christ, had not so sinned; "not worthy to be called an Apostle."

Morning after morning, cock-crowing after cock-crowing, S. Peter wept his fall. Some lentile-broth, of the daily value of a farthing^f, was, for his whole life long, the penitential food of him by whose hands God wrought special miracles, by whose shadow passing by He healed the sick; through whom He first admitted both Jews and Gentiles into the Church; to whom, first in dignity among the other Apostles, He gave the keys of the kingdom of heaven.

No one who has the heart of a man left, can know (as far as *man* can know) what sin is, and

^f S. Greg. Naz. Orat. xiv. de Paup. Cur. § 4.

what God is, and what He is to us, and not repent, his whole life through, for forgiven sin. One deadly sin is an infinite evil. Adam's one sin brought death into the world, and cost the Blood of the Redeemer. To choose wilfully one deadly sin is to choose Satan for God, to part with God, to renounce God, to be separated from God, to be alien from God for ever. Measure the depth of sin by what you will—the infinite price of the Blood of God the Son, or by the endless pains of Hell,—each is infinite. Infinite in value is the precious death of Christ; infinite in their duration are the pains of Hell. Infinite, too, is the love of God, against which the sinner sins.

Now if it were human love only, had we only deeply pierced a heart like our own, had we been ungrateful, unmerciful, unfaithful, cruel to a tender heart bound up in one with our own, and they had forgiven us, could we forget it? Would not their very look remind us? would not their loving gentleness reproach us? would not their very forgiving tenderness almost choke us? Were the good Father of the prodigal son, who had rebelled against him, wasted his substance with harlots, forsaken him, held his love cheap,—were that good Father a man only, could the restored son forget it? would not his “best robe,” and his “ring,” and the peace and abundance of his home, remind him of the swine-husks, and his rags, and his misery, and starvation?

And yet these, and all the tenderest affections, are just the images under which God shadows out to us His eternal love. Nay, He tells us that a forbearance which man could not use, He uses. He calls us children, though we rebel; He calls us friends, though we betray Him; He betroths our souls, and we forsake Him for vile, passing, sordid, brutish, disgusting pleasures. And He, what doth He? what saith He? "Thou hast played the harlot with many lovers, yet return again to Me, saith the Lord^s?" And what, if we return? "I will betroth thee unto Me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto Me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving-kindness, and in tender mercies. I will even betroth thee unto Me in faithfulness^h." He "abhors not our polluted and loathsome mouthⁱ," but admits us to the kiss of peace; us, "the ruined, wretched, excessive sinners." He not only receives us back again, but He receives us as if we had ever served Him. He upbraids us not. Nay, He tells us how, in the Day of Judgment, He will, if we "repent, and bring forth fruits meet for repentance," own us as though we had ever served Him, forget our past sins amid our tardy and lingering service, and welcome us, "miserable sinners," with His "Well done, good and faithful servant."

But shall we forget it? Surely his Lord's forgiving love is now, and will be for ever, part of

^s Jer. iii. 1.

^h Hos. ii. 19, 20.

ⁱ Bp. Andrewes' Devotions.

S. Peter's joy. Surely he cannot thank his Lord enough in all eternity for that gracious look of love amid his sin. Surely all His redeemed, yea, each one of us, if by His grace and mercy we attain, shall love Him above all things, and be amazed above all things, and ever go forth out of ourselves in wondering and adoring love, that, such as we were, He loved us, called us, gave us repentance, and faith, and love, forgave us, sanctified us, loved us unto the end.

Then, my brethren, it is unnatural, ungrateful, unloving, as well as perilous to our souls, to forget what we have been, to lay aside our repentance, while we are in the body.

It is perilous to our souls. For, if we forget our sins, we shall most likely, before we are aware, again fall into them. "Be not secure about forgiven sin, to add sin to sin." Sin which is but skinned over, bursts out again. It looks to thee dead, and thou thinkest thyself dead to it. If thou relax thy grasp, thou wilt find it but a seeming death. Well is it, if it spring not up again, and, ere thou art aware, slay thee!

But, were it ever so safe to forget forgiven sin, it is not loving, nor humble, nor reverent, nor grateful, nor happy. One who so forgets it, it is too likely, never had any true repentance at all. The bitterness of repentance passes away; repentance itself deepens, when its bitterness is gone. Love replaces fear, not sorrow. We may even have reason

to fear pride and wounded self-respect in that very bitterness. Yet it may be right that repentance should have bitterness. Peter "went out, and wept bitterly." "It is an evil thing and bitter to have offended the Lord thy God." It is a bitter thing to have lost innocence or purity; to be what God Himself cannot unmake; to have done what God can forgive, but what God's Omnipotence cannot cause to be undone; to have forfeited that to which God called you; to have to begin again; to have done what God must hate, else He would not be God.

But bitterness is not a chief part of repentance. It is rather a part of the punishment which God has annexed to sin than any ingredient of repentance. There will be bitterness enough in Hell, where there is no grace, no repentance. It is a bitter thing to discover, for what filth and wretchedness, what a thing of nothing, what a passing, unsatisfying, degrading pleasure, the soul has parted with God, lost His favour and grace, destroyed and damned itself, forfeited Heaven, brought itself down to Hell. It is a bitter thing for the soul to see how it has ruined itself, to have its sins, heaps upon heaps, brought before its eyes, another, and another, and another, a whole, endless array of sins, marshalled wherever it looks. They stand like so many spectres before it. They shriek in his ears, "Yes, you did me, and me, and me." The past lies stand up and say, "You did tell us, and for what? Because you could not endure a little shame; yet by us you offended God." Thefts arise and say, "Yes, you did

us, and for what vanities? To trick thyself out with some petty finery, or improve thy food, or get some petty self-indulgence for thy taste. It is all gone, but we remain, and by us you offended God." What a hideous band oaths are. The sinner sees them putting on the angry looks with which he uttered them, and mocking him with them, and taunting him, "We did thee no seeming, passing good, yet by us thou didst offend God!" Then follow the wrong jests, the profane jokes, the words which did shock modesty, or did laugh at innocence, and would make it ashamed of God's gift of purity, and destroy itself. These, too, repeat their jibes, and ask the soul, "What was your gain through us? Through us thou didst murder innocence, and purity, and loveliness, which God had made, in which Christ delighted, which the Holy Ghost hallowed." Then throng around the soul thoughts, and words, and acts of vanity, and pride, and conceit, and say to it, "With us thou didst trick thyself out; in us thou didst vaunt thyself and hug thyself; and didst hunt for the empty breath of praise, or flattery, or idle compliment; and didst idolize thyself, and seek to outdo others, and didst forget thy God; and what were we? what were we worth?" I have not spoken, my brethren, of a yet fouler brood, of which Scripture says, "it is a shame to speak of those things which are done of men in secret." Yet all the foulest sins of the heathen are done now by those who call themselves Christians. Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, las-

civiousness, sins done with no eye upon the sinners but the Eye of God and of the holy angels, and of the devils who tempted them, and clapt their hands in malicious exultation ; or sins which helped to drag others too to the pit ; sins of sight, of thought, of memory, of touch. If these have once been admitted by the soul, they come mostly heaps upon heaps, heaps upon heaps, one dragging on another, and that another, until what at first was a mere temptation from without, becomes a habit, seems to be a necessity, and the soul feeds on its daily poison, instead of its " daily Bread." Yet any one such sin is enough to plunge the soul in Hell.

It *is* a bitter thing to have forfeited for such emptinesses or such foulnesses, the grace and love of God. Think what God is,—All-Good, the Fountain of all Good, all Beauty, all Loveliness, all Wisdom ; Who hath in Him all which could be desired, enjoyed, loved. And what was the worth of thy sin, for which thou didst exchange thy God, and sell thy soul to Satan ? A misery when thou hadst done it. Horror, self-reproach, bitterness, self-hatred, the gnawing of conscience, touched by the grace of God, may be great helps toward a deep, self-abasing repentance. With this grace, they may lead to strictness, watchfulness, diligence in avoiding the borders of sin, " self-revenge," humility in oneself and towards others, and, in its time, zeal against that desolating monster, sin, and adoring amazement at the love and long-suffering of its

Redeemer, which so long endured its ingratitude. Without the grace of God, they lead the sinner to still deeper sin : they have made suicides as well as saints. They exist in Hell.

True repentance is, a loving sorrow which mourns, for the love of God, that it has offended God. This sorrow ought to live on ; yea, it deepens as God's goodness to the soul deepens. To part with it would be to part with love. For it springs from the Fountain of God's love and tenderness ; it was awakened by the tender, reproachful look of Jesus ; it was quickened by the Holy Spirit, Who melted the hardness of self-hatred into the subdued sorrow of penitent love.

Deceive not yourselves, my brethren, allow not yourselves to be deceived by any one who would tell you that repentance is a bitter, hard, distasteful, irksome way. It is an evil and bitter thing to have offended the Lord thy God, thy Redeemer, thy Lover, thy tender Father. It is an awful sight to behold thy sins. But thou hast not thy choice, whether thou wilt see them at all. Thou *must* see them—here, to lay them all at the Feet of Jesus, that He may cleanse thee from them ; or in the Day of Judgment, never to part with thee, but to drag thee down to Hell, and torment thee with their hateful sight for ever, deathless as thyself and as God.

It is a bitter thing to know how thou hast sinned ; but repentance is full of sweetness. It

flows from thy Redeemer's wide-open side, pierced for love of thee ; the Blood, which in thy sins thou despisedst, yea, (horrible,) didst trample on, gushes out anew to bedew thee, cleanse thee, mark thee again with His sacred Cross, which in thy baptismal innocence He put on thee, though now it is the Cross of Blood. He who was prodigal of His Blood for love of thee, is careful of thy tears, which thou sheddest in penitent sorrow, for love of Him. Angels watch over thee, and rejoice over thee. True, loving penitence has the blessing of well-nigh all those beatitudes whose wondrous fulness has so often amazed us. It wreathes in one the "Blessed are they that mourn," "Blessed are the poor in spirit," "Blessed are the meek," "Blessed are they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness;" and it holds them over thee for thy future crown and diadem ; yea, and that other blessing which thou mightest have thought for ever forfeited, "Blessed are the pure in heart,"—this, too, though as yet fainter, and dimmer, and higher, it yet hangs over thee ; for He has said, "What God has cleansed, that call not thou common," even thyself—cleansed by His Sacred Blood.

My brethren, you *would* have this lot ; you *would* escape Hell ; you would gain Heaven. Be not scared back from repentance. They have not tasted repentance with the edge of their lips, who speak of it as bitter. Bitter it is to have sinned ; bitter to have undone thyself ; bitter to have been ungrate-

ful to such great love. But this is past. It is that thou mayest not add bitterness to bitterness, that God calls thee to repentance. Bitter it is to be haunted by the memory of thy sins. If thou wouldest not be dogged by them, face them; look at them; abjure them; repent them; and they will haunt thee thus no more, or a hearty "Lord have mercy" will set thee at peace from them. Bitter is sin, bitter is its every fruit; but not bitter is true sorrow for sin,—it is full of sweetness; For it is full of the love of Jesus, and pours it over the wounded soul. Gnawing remorse, or loving, sweet, soothing sorrow! One thou must have, if thou hast sinned. Remorse, the foretaste of the sharp, fiery fangs of the undying worm; or loving sorrow, the herald of the never-ending joys of forgiven love.

Would you learn this loving sorrow? It is the gift of God. Do this, then. I will tell you only simple things. There are harder things for hardy souls. But these shall be simple, easy, what will hinder no work, over-tax no feebleness, wear no health.

Loving penitence is a great, precious gift of God. Ask it, then, of Him. "Ask, and ye shall receive." The Church often puts it into our mouths. Again and again we ask Him not only to forgive us our sins, but to "give us true repentance," to "give us hearts to love and dread Him." Make the most of these prayers; be very careful to use *them*. Ask

Him earnestly, continuously. He has pledged His own truth to you, that He will give it you.

But then do not act contrary to your prayers. It would be to act contrary to your prayers, in thought, word, or deed, to make light of sin. To make light of sin is to make light of Hell-fire, and of the Blood of Jesus. For sin cost the life of Jesus, and unrepented sin, with the sinner, is the fuel of Hell-fire.

Now sins were often done in buoyancy of spirits, amid jollity and gaiety of heart. And people who will not make a mock of sin, will let themselves go over in thought the pleasant scenes which surrounded it. Go not back in thought to anything connected with your sin. Shun the whole coast of sin. Its breath is death. Think you that S. Peter could ever speak of the coldness of the night of his Lord's Passion, and of his warming himself by the fire in the High Priest's palace? So neither do you, if you would preserve loving penitence, ever go back in thought to things, though sinless, if connected with thy sin. Think not that you may dwell safely in thought, on words of flattery or of love, and keep your soul away from the sin which followed. Before thou art aware, thou wilt have lost the fineness of thy sorrow for thy sin.

Avoid levity. Levity is not cheerfulness. It is mostly the veil of a heart-ache, if it spring not from mere emptiness, and it ends in a heart-ache.

One more, very solemn thing. Do not put away, as gloomy, any personal fear, even of being lost, or of death. If it comes often, God has some work for it to do in your soul. He sends it, or (which is one) He lets it come. He sends the fear into your soul, that you may have no cause to fear. He sends you fear to take away real fear. Let it have its way; only cast yourself with it, at the Feet of Jesus, and He will hush you more tenderly than your mother could.

These are only things which you are not to do. I have only as yet told you one thing to do—to pray earnestly for this loving sorrow.

The dread of Hell brought you, probably, to repentance. Shrink not from thinking of Hell. No one, probably, who thought much of it, ever fell into it. A poor woman who had its fires, day and night, before her eyes, and despaired of her salvation, and lost, for the time, power to pray, was asked, “Whether she would still commit a sin?” “No one *could* commit sin,” was the answer, “with the sight of that place before her, as I have now.” Think, morning by morning, of the four last things, Death, Judgment, Heaven, Hell, and that thou art one day nearer to thine everlasting abode. And by God’s mercy, thine everlasting abode will be with Jesus.

But think of them with the love of Jesus. Do not think only even of the great truths of faith,—that a ransom has been paid for us sinners, that we

are justified by faith ; but think of Jesus, speak to Jesus, pour out thy soul to Jesus, as thine own Redeemer, thy Friend, thy God, thy All. Live much by His Cross : the atoning drops will fall upon thee. Twine thyself round it with Magdalene. Look up to His forgiving eye, and say to Him, " Lord, I did crucify Thee ; I drove those hard nails into Thee ; my sins twisted those thorns around Thee ; yea, by my sins I had crucified Thee again ; worse yet, I despised Thy blood shed for me. Yet despise me not, O Lord, despise me not ; but wash me, cleanse me, keep me, like the penitent thief, by Thee."

Then, day by day, take all slights, and unkindnesses, and crosses, all pains and sufferings of body or spirit, as from thy Saviour's chastening Hand. What are we, that we should think much of slights, who deserve to rise to shame and everlasting contempt ? Humility and penitent love will grow together, if we take all good from God, as deserving it not, all evil with a " we indeed justly."

But if thou shouldest cling to our Lord as present to thy mind on the Cross, how much more when He comes to be present to thee, to give His Body and Blood to be verily and indeed received by thee ; when He comes, as we pray, to " cleanse thy sinful body by His Body, and to wash thy soul in His most precious Blood." Here tell Him chiefly,— " Lord, I am not worthy, I am not worthy that Thou shouldest come under my roof ; yet Thou who

didst not disdain to lie with the brute cattle, who despisedst not the harlot coming to Thee and touching Thee, despise not me, but take away my sin, the utter sinner^k." Then, when thou hast received His Holy Body and His Life-giving Blood, cry to Him with a yet deeper heart's cry, "O Lord God, Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world, have mercy upon me."

Once more. As God has shewn mercy upon thy soul, have mercy upon others. He who said to S. Peter, "When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren," says it, in our little measure, to each of us. Only let it be in humility, and in allowed ways. At least, pray for sinners who forget God, with thyself.

I spoke of life-long penitence; I might have better said, a "life-short" penitence. Short, at the longest, were the life of man. Too little to requite the love of God were the love and service of a whole life. More or less of thy time of service has already been cut short by thy service of sin. Short as life is, a life-long service and devotion were something precious. For it is a whole, all which a creature could offer to its Creator. But when the first, best years have been wasted in thoughtlessness or sin; when thou hast already spoiled thine offering, and hast no whole burnt-offering to make to Him; when thou hast only, if not the dregs and refuse, yet only the residue of thy life to offer, then to

^k Bp. Andrewes' Devotions.

speak of a "life-long" offering of any sort seems almost a mockery. Yet it means,—offer to God the whole which thou canst, and God will accept that whole, though it be but a short fragment of this poor, short span of our life. Only, since thou canst no longer give Him all, let thy heart sorrow to Him till thou see Him, that thou hast so wasted His gifts, and now canst only offer Him what is so little, so poor, so marred by thy sin. God does not ask of thee suffering; He asks of thee only sorrow, that thou didst displease Him, sorrow for this brief time, into which He will infuse calmness, and peace, and rest. By loving grief for sin, He will soothe all other grief; He will, amid thy sorrow, give thee many a thrill of joy, more transporting far than this world's highest, purest joys; He will gather thy tears and turn them into pearls in the Heavenly crown He prepareth for thee; and when thou beholdest His forgiving Countenance, how wilt thou wonder that thy few tears of penitence¹ should have "quenched for thee the fires of hell;" that thy brief mourning should so be comforted; thy few brief sighs be turned into endless Halleluias; thy passing sorrow, stamped and hallowed by thy Saviour's Blood, be thy passport to thy Lord's own joy!

¹ Tert. de Pœnit., c. xii. p. 369, Oxf. Tr. See p. 766, note m.



T H E P A S S I O N .

A S E R M O N ,

P R E A C H E D I N

T H E C H U R C H O F S T . M A R Y - T H E - V I R G I N ,

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F R I D A Y , A P R I L 3 , 1857 .

BY

J O H N , L O R D B I S H O P O F L I N C O L N .

O X F O R D ,

A N D 377, S T R A N D , L O N D O N :

J O H N H E N R Y A N D J A M E S P A R K E R .

M D C C C L V I I .





A SERMON,

&c.

ST. JOHN xii. 32.

“ And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all
men unto Me.”

“ THIS He said,” continues the Evangelist, “ signifying what death He should die.” It is obvious why our Saviour, speaking to a mixed audience of disciples and enemies, used this obscure expression. To have declared, as He had on a former occasion to the apostles, that “ the chief priests and the scribes would deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify Him^a,” would have been to put them on their guard against fulfilling the prediction, and to induce them to contrive some other way of destroying Him. Or, at least, it might have been said afterwards, that His own words had suggested the course which they adopted. This was not to be. The Divine prescience foresees all that men will do : they can do nothing but by the direction or permission of the Divine omnipotence ; but they act as free agents, determined by their own motives and with the choice of their own will. Our Saviour, therefore, used an expression

^a St. Matt. xx. 19.

to denote His death, the propriety of which would be obvious, after the event, to all, but which was intelligible at the time only to those who had received clearer intimations of the mode of His sufferings, or who had heard such language as that in which He had addressed Nicodemus,—“As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up^b.”

His meaning, however, is now sufficiently clear. “I,” if I am crucified, or when I have been crucified, “will draw all men unto Me.” It is rather the latter part of the verse to which I request your attention. I am to speak to you to-night of the Passion of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. It is a boundless subject; the central point of the world’s history, whence issue forth the lines of reverential thought back to the eternal counsels of God, and through the types and sacraments of every elder dispensation, and down into the secret life of our own inner being, its sorrows, and hopes, and struggles,—and onward through the waxing conflict between evil and good, even to the triumphant day when all things shall be put under the Redeemer’s feet. We must select, in order that we may profit. I do not purpose, then, to lead you through the circumstances of our Saviour’s Passion; the indignity and the trial, the buffeting, the scourging, and the spitting, the mocking robe and crown of thorns, the lingering cross and parching death—

^b St. John iii. 14.

thirst, the love strong in suffering which mourned for the daughters of Jerusalem, and stooped from the accursed tree to commit His mother to His disciple's care, the Godlike intercession for His murderers, the mysterious cry which alone gave token of the soul's unrevealed agony within, and that last deep word which enfolded all the counsels of God and all the salvation of men, when He cried, "It is finished, and bowed His head, and gave up the Ghost;"—I do not dwell on these, though each step leads to a pregnant truth, and teaches a lesson from Him who "suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow His steps." Neither shall I speak particularly of the Passion, as the great, propitiatory sacrifice,—the one only and sufficient atonement for all the sins of the whole world. Nor can I stay to meditate now on the spiritual counterpart of Christ's Passion in ourselves; our death with Him, that we may live in and for Him; the cross of the inner man, by which the world is crucified unto us, and we unto the world. I would speak of His Passion as the great constraining motive at work on the human soul, that which draws to Christ. How does our crucified Lord draw all men unto Him? What is this attractive power of His cross? Has He drawn us unto Him? or is He drawing us unto Him now? These are questions which the words of the text suggest, some of which it will be the object of this discourse to answer,

• 1 St. Pet. ii. 21.

while to the others our own consciences must give the reply.

I. "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me." The great purpose for which our Lord was lifted up on the cross supplies at once the first application of His words. "God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son^o;" and the love of God in the salvation of man by the death of His Son on the cross draws all men to Jesus Christ by the cords of love. It is an idea which we can very imperfectly grasp, and which words cannot rightly express, the love of God to man as revealed in the Gospel. We were fallen and rebellious, and by our own sin had forfeited the favour of God, and subjected ourselves to the fearful sentence of infinite justice. Helpless we were, and hopeless; nor was there anything in our corrupt and evil nature to merit the interposition or to win the compassion of an all-holy Being. But He, in His great mercy, was pleased to rescue from their fallen state the frail and ruined creatures He had made; and He did it by no less a miracle of love than by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, to condemn sin in the flesh. The eternal Word humbled Himself to our low estate, and was made man; and as God and man, one Christ, lived in poverty and toil, "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." But death is the penalty of sin; and therefore He

^o St. John iii. 16.

laid down His life for mankind, and voluntarily bore the punishment which we had deserved. And this death, and the atonement which it made, are the highest proof and expression of the divine love. "In this," writes St. John, "was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins^d." "Greater love," said our Saviour, "hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends^e." But He laid down *His* life for His enemies, for a disobedient and rebellious race. And therefore the apostle argues, "When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die, yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us^f." And He died for us voluntarily, and by a death at once the most agonizing and the most ignominious. "No man," He said, "taketh My life from Me, but I lay it down of Myself^g." "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He shall presently give Me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the Scripture be fulfilled, that thus it

^d 1 St. John iv. 9, 10.

^e St. John xv. 13.

^f Rom. v. 6.

^g St. John x. 18.

must be^b?" The Scriptures, by which God spoke, had declared all to be under a curse; "for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them¹:" and Christ, that He might redeem us from the curse of the law, and be made a curse for us, humbled Himself, not only unto death, but to the death of the cross; "for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree¹." And He died, lastly, not only that He might taste of death for us, and "through death destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil^k," but that He might rise again, the cause and proof of our resurrection; be highly exalted, as mediatorial King of heaven and earth, "that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow¹;" might reign over His rescued people, saving them from the power of their enemies, and sending to them the royal gifts of His Holy Spirit; and that He might be, even on the throne of His glory, a merciful and faithful High-Priest, touched with the feeling of our infirmities which He Himself has borne, and sympathizing with our temptations from which He alone can deliver. Christ lifted up on the cross, then, sums up, as it were, the countless treasures of God's love to man. It is the pledge of our pardon, the cost of grace, the fountain of our holiness. It is the centre of that boundless circle of love, whose circumference touches the everlasting

^b St. Matt. xxvi. 53, 54.

¹ Gal. iii. 10; Deut. xxvii. 26.

^j Gal. iii. 13; Deut. xxi. 23.

^k Heb. ii. 14.

¹ Phil. ii. 10.

counsels of God, and extends beyond the judgment and through the ages of eternity.

Now the love of Christ thus manifested on the cross, should have, and has, an attractive power on the human heart. It draws to Christ. It strikes upon a chord which is seldom wanting, though it may often and long be silent in the breast. To love because we feel that we are loved, is almost a law of our nature ; and the most rugged disposition is seldom proof against the gentle power of affection. And thus Christ crucified for us is the solvent which melts the hardness of the natural heart, and warms it into love. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins:" "We love Him, because He first loved us^m." "The love of Christ," writes the Apostle, "constraineth us ; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead : and that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them and rose againⁿ."

And it is mainly because the love of Christ lifted up for us on the cross is so little known or so little appreciated, that so many, in a Christian country and with the name and profession of Christians, are still so far from Christ and God. They have been placed, or have placed themselves, without the attractive influence of the cross ; or they have re-

^m 1 St. John iv. 10—19.

ⁿ 2 Cor. v. 14, 15.

sisted Him who was drawing them, and wilfully turned away from the constraining force of love.

To take a case only too common in all ranks of society. There are those who, without rejecting revelation, secretly disbelieve it, or at least have persuaded themselves that it is so uncertain whether it is true as a whole, or what are the doctrines which it really teaches, that it is better and more philosophical, without disturbing the faith of others, not to trouble themselves about it, but to employ themselves, as they speak, in the more practical duties of life. I need not say that with such religion is no motive, but that their actions must be regulated (as a heathen's might be) by prudence, or shame, or the maxims of society. Their inner history is often this : they have learnt enough of God to believe that He is holy and just, and enough of themselves to have a consciousness of having offended Him ; they have had convictions of sin at times, and a dread of the Divine displeasure, and perhaps of coming judgment ; but they have neither probed their soul's disease, nor searched the gospel for a remedy. They do not know the real extent of their sinfulness, nor the freeness and fullness of the pardon which is offered for repented sin. Probably, too, they are secretly unwilling to give up the practices and indulgences, of the evil of which they are partially conscious. Religion, therefore, is to them an unpleasant subject ; it condemns and threatens. It repels them, and they begin to wish

it were not true. The wish soon swells into a hope. There are many difficulties in revelation ; many objections not easy to answer. Acute and intellectual men have doubted of its truth, or explained away its doctrines. To such doubts and difficulties they cling ; and without ever fairly examining the question, weighing the evidence for and against, and candidly and conscientiously deciding by the preponderance of proof, they settle into an irrational scepticism, without motives, without comfort, and without hope.

Now the only power which can attract souls in this unhappy state, is the love of Christ lifted up on the cross. The idea once entertained and realized alters their whole relation to religion and God, and counteracts many of those influences which made them wish to disbelieve. It implies, indeed, a heinousness and danger in sin of which they had little conception before ; and it gives distinctness and certainty to their vague impression, that it is impossible to continue in sin and to be saved. But it opens a new and most engaging view of God and of His dealings with the souls of men. It shews Him not only ready to pardon, and willing to be reconciled to the returning penitent ; but so ready, so willing, that to procure his pardon and to work his reconciliation He has given His only-begotten Son a sacrifice for sin.

What may not be hoped from love like this ? Is this a revelation from which man should shrink ?

Rather, does not such love, surpassing the reach and the conception of mere human love, carry its own conviction with it? Is it not exactly adapted to our soul's most urgent wants? Does it not, without the least sacrifice of God's holiness and justice,—yea, while it magnifies them to the utmost,—supply a balm to the heart's deepest anxieties, its dread of the Divine displeasure, its consciousness of sin, its fear of judgment? And is it not the love of a Saviour to whom the heart of humanity may cling; not merely God in the unapproachable mystery of His spiritual being, but man in the truth of our nature, made like us, feeling like us, tempted like us, and for us, in our stead, suffering on the cross? And thus the barriers of unbelief fall down, which the wayward soul had raised between itself and truth. The attraction of the cross is felt; faith and love warm into being together; and as the humbled, happy penitent turns to the cross, the Saviour's promise is fulfilled, "And I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me."

I have taken purposely an extreme case,—that of secret unbelief. But there are other ways by which souls are kept from Christ which can be drawn to Him only by the power of His cross. Many, for instance, are so absorbed in the business and pleasures of the world, in their studies or their amusements, that for all saving purposes they are as far from Christ as the unbeliever. They have no interest in

Him, no trust in Him, no sincere desire to serve Him. It is not that they are ignorant of the Gospel, or that they reject it; but it has never reached their hearts, which are set on things below, and occupied with what this life supplies or promises. And you may reason with such characters in vain; they know all you have to say; they admit it; they approve it; but they do not *feel* it. It must be something which touches the heart, which can bring them to Christ. And what should do this, but Christ crucified,—for their sakes lifted up from the earth? Why was this? Why did the incarnate Son of God suffer? For your sins, ye careless and selfish ones; because your sins, if unatoned for,—aye, and if unrepented and unforsaken, even when atoned for,—must weigh you down at the judgment-day, and condemn you to an eternity of hopeless misery. Because He loves you, and would not have you perish; and though you have neglected Him, and thought little of His offers and His mercy, He yet bore your sins in His own body on the cross, and endured those hours of unutterable anguish, for you,—even for *you*, and for your salvation. And is not that love pleading with you now? Does it not condemn you of ingratitude for your cold neglect, and draw your hearts to Him who still would be your Saviour? Can you refuse to listen to the invitations of Him who for you poured out His soul unto death, and who not only permits you to hope when He might justly condemn you, but

intreats you to repent and believe, that He may be able to pardon you? Is there not reason, no less than gratitude, in the conviction of the apostle, when he exclaims, "The love of Christ constraineth us, because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead; and that He died for all that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves,"—as you, perhaps, have hitherto done,—"but unto Him which died for them, and rose again °?"

And surely the love of Christ lifted up for us on the cross should draw us *all* to Him. I speak now more particularly to those who are not unmindful of their Saviour, but who have learnt something of their own sinfulness and need, and are trusting, though it may be with too weak and faltering faith, on Him as their only Redeemer and Advocate. But, dear brethren, are we as near to Him as we should be? Do we love Him as we ought, and as He deserves? Do not our hearts at times misgive us, as we read the apostle's blessing, "Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity^p;" or his curse, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema, Maranatha^q?" How do these words apply to us? Is our love real? Oh, then, meditate more on Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Make fuller proof of His love; recollect that "we love Him,

° 2 Cor. v. 14, 15.

^p Eph. vi. 24.

^q 2 Cor. xvi. 22.

because He first loved us ;” cling closer to His promises, and lean more simply and trustingly on His mercy, till your heart warms and glows towards Him, and you can humbly take up the protestation of the penitent apostle, “ Lord, Thou knowest all things ; Thou knowest that I love Thee^r.” Above all, never forget that love is at the same time proved and nourished by obedience ; and that we are nearest Christ in proportion as we follow Christ. “ He that hath My commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me. If a man love Me, he will keep My words ; and My Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him^s.”

II. And these words lead us to remark that, though the love of Christ lifted up from the earth on the cross is the motive to draw all men unto Him, yet the power is the Holy Ghost. “ No man can come unto Me,” He said, “ except the Father which hath sent Me draw him^t.” And the gifts of the Spirit by which the Father draws to Him, are the consequences of His death for us on the cross. “ It is expedient for you,” He said, “ that I go away : for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you ; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you^u.” Having been lifted up on the cross, and there made an atonement for all sin, He was again “ lifted up from the earth,” and ascended into

^r St. John xxi. 17.

^t Ibid. vi. 44.

^s Ibid. xiv. 21, 23.

^u Ibid. xvi. 7.

heaven. Then was fulfilled the prophecy of the Psalmist, "Thou hast ascended on high, Thou hast led captivity captive: Thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them^x." Or as St. Peter expressed the fulfilment on the day of Pentecost, "Being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, He hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear^y." Thus, then, the raising of Christ first on the cross, and afterwards into heaven, has procured for us the promise of a power,—an almighty power,—to draw us to Him. The grace of the Holy Ghost, given for Christ's sake to His people, convinces of sin, and makes the heart feel the need of a Saviour; brings us to Him in real repentance and a trusting faith; takes of the things of Christ and shews them unto us, enabling us to conceive of Him in all His offices, as our Prophet, Priest, and King, and to "know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge;" sheds abroad His love in our hearts; and guides and strengthens us to obey Him and to follow His example,—the condition at once and the proof of our union with Him. "He that keepeth His commandments dwelleth in Him, and He in him. And hereby we know that He abideth in us, by the Spirit which He hath given us^z."

The promise of His grace, my brethren, was

^x Ps. lxxviii. 18. ^y Acts ii. 33. ^z 1 St. John iii. 24.

covenanted to us in our baptism ; and by it He has been drawing us to Him. Various instruments He uses, and deals differently with different souls ; but it is the self-same Spirit which worketh all in all. By the education of parents and sponsors, by His providences and the occurrences of life, by the blessings of prosperity and the lessons of affliction, by His written word which He Himself inspired, by the ordinances of His Church, by the exhortations of His ministers, by the virtue of His sacraments, by checks, and warnings, and encouragements to good, by the still small voice of conscience, by mercy and judgments, by hope and fear, He has been striving with our wayward hearts to draw us to Christ, or to keep us with Him. It is a solemn question to ask ourselves,—but it should be asked honestly, and should have an answer,—have we been drawn by Him ? Have we given up ourselves to His guidance, lived by His word, employed the means of grace by which He works, listened to His pleadings within us and suggestions of good, shunned sin and followed holiness, as those who are the temples of the Holy Ghost, in whom the Spirit of God dwells ? Or have we grieved Him by wilful sin, provoked Him by inconsistent conduct, and selfish, worldly lives ; neglected or undervalued the ordinances which He employs and blesses, resisted His strivings consciously, or carelessly neglected them ?

Then what wonder if we are so far from Christ ?

What wonder, if religion has so little comfort, and the Gospel so little interest? What wonder, if we know so little of the reality of penitence, the hope of pardon, "the joy and peace in believing," and the happiness of love? He has drawn us, and we would not be drawn. O let us earnestly seek that Holy Spirit, which Jesus was lifted up on the cross to procure, and raised up to the right hand of God to give,—who is our only strength and wisdom, the only source of holiness, the only renewer of our nature, whose presence is the pledge of pardon and earnest of glory, but to be without whom is to be none of Christ's. Let us not rest from prayer and watchfulness, and daily persevering endeavour, till our hearts and lives are changed by His blessed influence; till our repentance is deeper, our faith firmer, our love warmer; and till, by and in all, we are drawn nearer to Christ, and by the same Holy Spirit dwell in Him and He in us. To be in Christ, remember, is our justification and our holiness here, our safety at the day of judgment, and the happiness of eternity. "There is now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus^a." "He that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without Me,"—apart from Me,—"^bye can do nothing^b." "And now, little children, abide in Him; that, when He shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed

^a Rom. viii. 1.

^b St. John xv. 5.

before Him at His coming^c." And when His apostle would sum up in one expression of trusting love his hope of future bliss, he calls it "a desire to depart and *to be with Christ*, which is far better^d."

Yet one more solemn thought. For I may not forget that we are in the Church's season of penitence, and that there must be those among us who know not yet what penitence really is, and who, careless of the matter altogether, or content with the surface of religion,—have never grappled with the question of their soul's salvation. And life is gliding on. And from time to time, and with accelerating frequency, death will summons us to our account; some in early youth, when the dazzle of the world is brightest and most perilous; some in mid age, when the cares of life gather round, and even duties, if not consciously done for God, and in the very shadow, as it were, of the cross, deaden the spirit's life; and others in later years, when the crust of habit has hardened over the character, and the scars and furrows of past conflicts and sins are deep sunken in it: and the summons will find us mostly as our life has been. It is not to limit God's mercy, but to describe the usual tenor of His laws and providence, to say that little that is earnest, and real, and saving is transacted, for the most part, between the soul and God in the weak, dizzy, wildering hours of mortal sickness and the death-bed, when thought is but the brain's feeble wan-

^c 1 St. John ii. 28.

^d Phil. i. 23.

derings, and prayer little more than a wish to pray. And thus the scene closes ; and the spirit flits from its clay dwelling to the presence of Him who gave it. And as it stands, naked and conscious, in the full gaze of that all-seeing eye, and the events of the bygone life recur in rapid and vivid succession, and forgotten feelings, and pleadings, and sins reappear on the page of memory, and the soul for the first time knows its whole self, — can we doubt what conviction will overwhelm the unrepentant and unforgiven with the bitterest anguish and the deepest shame ? Surely, it will be their life-long resistance to unwearied mercy, which *would* have drawn them, and they would not be drawn. Surely, it will be warnings disregarded, convictions stifled, holy resolves postponed, salvation trifled with, the Saviour unheard, the cross slighted, the Spirit grieved. Oh ! there is no remorse like that for love neglected ; no wrath so terrible as “ the wrath of the Lamb ^e ! ”

Go home, then, and think of these things, ye who have need to do so. “ Behold, now is the accepted time ; behold, now is the day of salvation ^f. ”

^e Rev. vi. 16.

^f 2 Cor. vi. 2.







